THE INVADERS

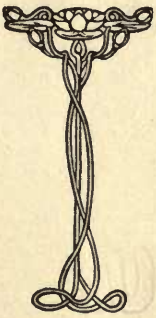
FRANCES NEWTON SYMMES ALLEN

THE INVADERS

GENEALOGY

OF THE

Noble Families of America



370

Published by

BARKER BROTHERS

220 Milk Street

BOSTON, MASS., U. S. A.

March 17, 1895

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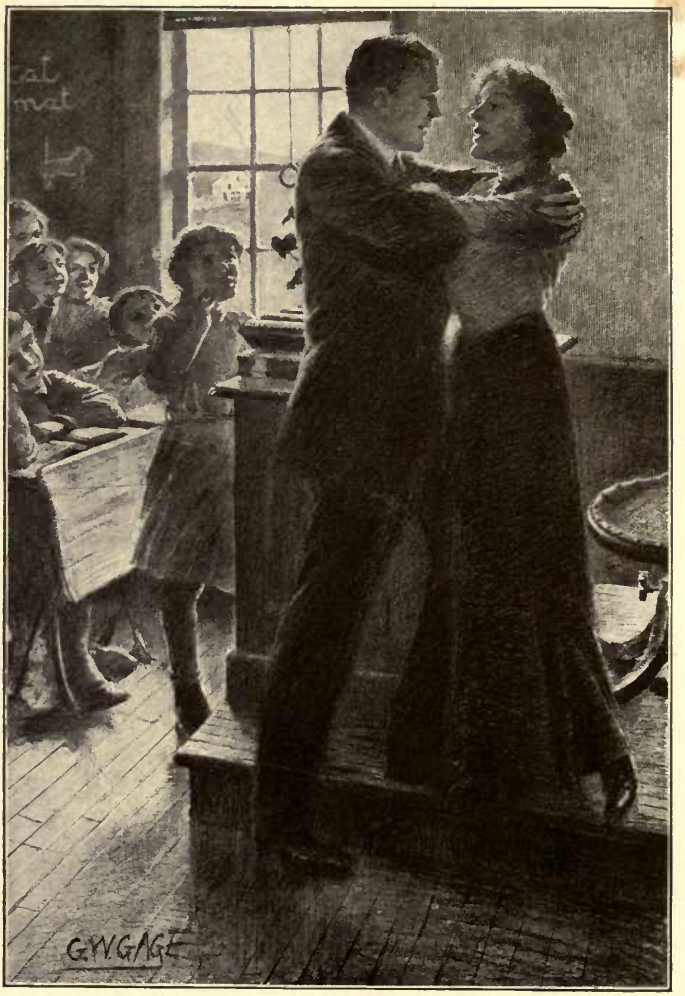
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"LET'S MAKE IT A HOLIDAY!" (*page* 369.)

The Invaders

By

Frances Newton Symmes Allen



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TO

KATHARINE OBER BAYLEY

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THE INVADERS

THE INVADERS

CHAPTER I

COLORS IN THE MISTS

THE mists that hid Sugarloaf and made a mountain of Toby brought the children's voices quite clearly to the two men waiting under the rock maple by the cemetery gate. The one, gray-faced and gray-haired, in army cape and veteran's hat, sat on a flat, lichened tombstone, his very blue eyes traveling from one soldier's grave to the other. His companion, young and ruddy and well-knit, in white sweater and golf trousers, leaned on the stone wall, his bare head crinkled with abundant tawny hair. He was looking away, frowning at the vast levels of the onion fields faintly green with the new crop, and deserted except for the bent figures of the weeders in the rows.

"But, Grandfather," he had just said, rolling a cigarette between his shapely hands, "living is a long sight cheaper in Paris than it is here, even as we live. So economy is no excuse."

"O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave"

floated soft and high, in broken intervals, from far down the road.

"Don't discuss it now, Dacre. Not now!" the old man said impatiently. "It's the wrong time."

"But La Rose is holding the place for me. It's now or never if I'm to work in his studio. And they sail June twenty-eighth. What's the use of holding on to the old —"

"No use, God knows, if you're so bent on this cursed folly. If you've no spark of manhood in you, let the Polanders have it."

The color flooded the old man's face, and he got tremblingly to his feet, steadying himself with shriveled white hands.

"That's sense, Grandfather. Let the Polanders have the place — if they'll take it! You could live like a gentleman in an apartment in town. The old house is tumbling down over your head and the river is eating up the land. Besides, it's only fair for me to have my chance."

"Damn the chance! Your father and I — we took no chance. We worked the old place where generations of our family had worked before us. We were n't above work."

"So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea,
As we were marching through Georgia."

High and sweet and nearer came the young voices, and far down the wide road, under the old rock maples, fluttered the children's banners.

"And what — what has it all amounted to, your and Father's work?" Dacre threw in bitterly, tossing his cigarette into the wet clover.

The old major put out a steadying hand to the headstone at his side. "Amount to?" he repeated, with a quick breath. "Amount to! To a dignified competence until — until Ladd did n't pay the note your father had endorsed for him. You know it all, that story, as well as I do. Ladd was our ruin. Then your father died, and" — his breath came short — "and then the old place and I wore out — and the river —"

"That 's just it!" the young man interrupted. "The old place is worn out. In a few years no one will take it off your hands. It would take thousands of dollars even to get it started again. Think of what it would cost to reshingle all those old roofs. And what 's the use when the river is practically eating up the

land? No one wants to live on what's really an island after every big storm. But the thing is, Grandfather, I've got this gift and now's —"

"Gift! Tomfoolery! Olivia Ladd has made a fool of you just because you did those posters for the college plays. It's all Olivia's —"

"Olivia be damned!" Dacre muttered under his breath, reddening darkly.

Major Welling had not heard him. Instead, he had moved a little way from the supporting tombstone, and with squared shoulders and lifted hat, stood looking at the advancing procession.

"As He died to make men holy,
Let us die to make men free,"

sang the children, turning from the highway into the grassy cemetery road. Two by two they came, flaxen and brown and black heads all bare, a wreath of running pine over the right shoulder, a flag in the right hand, a bunch of vivid lupin or swamp pink or sand violets in the left. Behind them, with eyes for all, came the teacher, reaching now here, now there, to keep the line in marching order, and then turning back to chat with the mothers and big sisters who brought up the rear.

The Major had advanced still farther from

under the maple, and stood unsupported at the side of the road. The years seemed suddenly to have slipped off him, and, a young soldier again, he stood at attention, erect, arms at the side, keen eyes in front. At sight of him, the children stopped and looked quickly at the teacher.

"Cheer," her lips framed softly, and she lifted her flag.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" came the shrill shout. Flags fluttered up into the gray.

The Major saluted. His blue eyes had dimmed. A faint color had come into his thin cheeks. He held his gold-corded veteran's hat over his heart.

"Fellow soldiers," he began in his trembling old voice, — "Fellow soldiers, I have seen Lee's army and Grant's army drawn up before Richmond — gray lines and blue lines as long as from here to — to Sugarloaf there in the mist. Often I have heard a whole battlefield of brave men singing what you have been singing, with death waiting for them just across the line. I've seen — I've seen" — his voice shook and he fumbled under the old cape for his handkerchief — "I've seen old flags, bloodstained and shot-torn, flutter in the Shenandoah — and — and, fellow-soldiers, I've heard the cheers at Rich-

mond — but never — never has the sight been braver than now — now — "

Before his voice utterly failed him, there was a break in the ranks. A small, square, thick-headed boy, in a uniform of bare brown legs and over-large denim shirt and trousers, rushed from his place straight to the Major, with outstretched wreath and flag and flowers.

"Nicholas! Nicholas Brogodzd!" called the teacher; and then, when Nicholas heeded not, "What has seized the child! He understands barely a word of English. The family are just over. See him now!"

Somehow, the Major seemed perfectly to understand. He was smiling, and he had hung the wreath over his arm, and, the child's hand in his, stepped to the head of the procession.

"Sing," said the teacher, smiling through sudden tears.

"Cover them over with beautiful flowers,
Deck them with garlands, those brothers of ours,"

rang the little voices; and down among the graves filed Polish and Irish and Lithuanian, and the child or two whose forefathers had built the white meeting-house, and been the great men of the valley.

Dacre, leaning on the wall, had forgotten

Paris and Olivia. His gray eyes, under their thick, level brows, had lost their frown, and regained the pleasant indolence of expression that made women call them dangerous.

"Rather nice, the coloring," he was commenting to himself, and then introspectively rejoiced to find himself so sensitive to color. "That lupin blue is good," he went on rather more deliberately and consciously. "And those olive-skinned Poles are n't so bad in a lump, with a lot of color around them. They 're good in this gray, even if the girls' cotton stockings do wrinkle around their legs and the boys' coatsleeves are all down over their knuckles. Drawing bad, coloring good, perhaps sums up the picture. And now — " He drew a long breath.

His grandfather was beginning. He had heard this kind of thing before. It was not artistic, the war, and it had been rather overdone — since. Lincoln was hideously overdone. America always overdid things. That was why she had no sort of art. She made no shades, no nuances. She had no temperament.

"But Jove! There 's temperament for you!" he found himself exclaiming aloud. "Grandfather and that stocky, black-eyed little Po-

lander actually understand each other! And now look at them!"

Then he fell silent and watched grouping and coloring as the children and the Major trimmed the graves. Around each headstone or each mound they gathered and listened as the veteran told of him who lay beneath, or whose memorial it was.

"In memory of Richard, who died at Ship Island, Miss., April 16, 1863, aged 22 years, and who is buried there," he read.

And then little Elizabeth Chase and Michael Leary and Nora O'Connor and Leo Krakoski and Romon Krasinska and Thaddeus Yusso, and Stephanya and Elena and Apollonia spread sand violets and swamp pink and wild iris over the turf.

The gray of the mist had grown a shade darker. The hills were gone. The bent weeders in the onion-fields were blurred against the green.

"Nice the rain held off for the exercises," Miss Hollins was saying to the teacher. "And if you aren't the one for bright ideas! It's been lovely. And what a genius you are to have Major Welling here!"

"He's enjoyed it too," Mrs. Clabby put in

breathlessly, catching up to the others and pinning a buttercup on her black calico shirtwaist. "But don't it seem a shame that the old families like the Wellings and the Hammonds and all the others is gittin' pushed out by the Irish and the Polanders!"

"But that child that ran to him with the wreath!" Miss Hollins interrupted. "If that's the Polish way, it's rather nice, I think."

"He's a bold child, that Brogodzd, or whatever his name is," Mrs. Clabby protested. "Outlandish names, ain't they! Wonder who on earth ever made 'em up!"

Dacre had untied the old gray mare and stood waiting by the rickety basket phaeton. The phaeton had been bought for his mother before he came. As a small boy he had sat in it on a hassock when she drove his father back from the Boston train. He could remember the talk not intended for his ears, of the low price of tobacco, of the poor corn-crop, while he sucked lemon stick to a point and liked his father's knee on each side of him.

The children were straggling off. The Major came slowly out of the gate, saluting Miss Hollins and Mrs. Clabby and Mrs. Leary and Mrs. Krakoski.

"It 's good to see you, Major," Miss Hollins called. "And we 'll soon be seeing Olivia, shan't we, Dacre? Prunella had a letter Monday."

"I suppose so," Dacre answered flatly.

The Major did not hear. He was getting heavily into the phaeton. Dacre sprang in and cut the old mare sharply.

"At any rate, it was n't too long," he said.

"It was magnificent," the old man answered decisively, folding his hands on the top of his cane.

CHAPTER II

TWO HEROINES VIS-À-VIS

OVER the coffee-urn at the foot of Mrs. Sturgis's rose-trimmed table, Olivia could plainly see the mountains. It was this relieving glimpse that had decided her on taking Mrs. Chase's coffee-urn at the foot of the table rather than Mrs. Archibald's solid silver heirloom teapot at the head. Prunella Loomis, Miss Hollins's niece, profited perhaps by the choice, for the bow-window, with its open sashes looking out into blowing, fragrant woodbine, made an admirable background for her dark prettiness in her last summer's yellow organdie.

"I feel selfish, Olivia," Prunella called down over the roses and bonbons and wafers among the dozen borrowed candlesticks under the pink shades. "There 's an elegant breeze here for a background. You 'll be hot when the rush comes."

"But your breeze is my foreground, you know," Olivia said, a little too cleverly, thought Prunella, who had n't been graduated from college the day before with high honors. In fact,

it was more the idea that Olivia had been to college than the cleverness of what she had just answered that made Prunella think it too clever.

As yet, the crush had n't come. Mrs. Sturgis's committee had announced the Food Sale for from three to six, to give time, after the village dinners, for dishwashing and the beginning of another appetite, and, before the village suppers, for heating up left-overs and setting forth the purchases of the afternoon. It was only just three o'clock, striking flatly from the spire of the very white meeting-house whose leaky roof was the cause of this daring culinary enterprise. In the front parlor there were only half a dozen or so forerunners of the crush, leaning over the two narrow damask-covered counters that ran imposingly the length of the low-ceiled old room, and eying and smelling the brown of things baked and roasted and preserved, and the green and gold of things dressed.

Mrs. Archibald, holding her eyeglasses over her nose, affected great interest in Sarah Tibbetts's raised cake at one dollar a loaf, but in reality she was looking at Olivia Ladd. She had come early, indeed, rather for the purpose of

looking at Olivia Ladd than for getting first choice of the wares.

"Made from her Aunt Caroline Eversham's rule, and such a frostin'! Not a slab in the burying-ground has a more marblelike look," Mrs. Egerton said enthusiastically, moving the cake into a better showing.

"If 'twas just me," Mrs. Archibald hesitated, confidentially, "I'd buy in a minute. But Abner's so squeamish. He always says raised cake don't set. I'll sorter look round at the salad."

Just in a line with the raised cake, the dining-room door framed Olivia in her scant, heavy white linen, seated tall behind the coffee-urn. More than Olivia, the doorway revealed little except cups and saucers and the shine of one candle. Olivia was disposing her cups around the tray with a view to more expeditious pouring when business grew brisk. Her arms looked brown below the severe conclusion of her elbow sleeves.

"Pretty plain dressin'!" Mrs. Archibald exclaimed abstractedly. "The taste would have been better if —"

"Law, no! It's real mayonnaise. You just try it, Mrs. Archibald," Mrs. Egerton spoke up promptly, handing over a fork. "An' salads do

set well! Why, Dr. Barker says folks ought to drink olive oil."

"It was Livvy Ladd I was talkin' about," Mrs. Archibald corrected her. "Considerin' the occasion and her just home from college, and the standin' of the family an' all, it does seem like she might have — "

"Standin' of the family!" Mrs. Egerton exclaimed, dropping stoutly on the Sheraton chair behind the counter. "Standin' don't pay your bills! An' the talk is — Mr. Egerton got it in meetin' last night — the talk is that Mary Ladd is mortgaged up to her eyes — even the high pasture. An' you know what store Lawyer Ladd set by that high pasture. Why, he'll turn in his — "

Mrs. Archibald's glasses just escaped the potato salad as they fell. "You don't say! Even the high pasture!" she repeated in a lowered tone. "Who 's Mary mortgaged to? And her that proud!"

"Mortgaged to? Why, to the Irish, of course. To that Mike Joyce that has made such fine onion and tobacco crops on the Hollins's place. Yes, even the high pasture with the trout brook and the chestnut grove. Think of Lawyer Ladd — and now this Irishman!"

Mrs. Archibald leaned far over the salads and affected to pull her skimp black net veil down over her mouth. "An' they say," she murmured, looking down at the salmon and lettuce, "they say that Livvy Ladd an' Dacre Welling are as good as engaged. What they 'll marry on I 'd like to know! he ain't worth shucks."

"She 'll do the sup— Yes, raised cake, Miss Hollins. One dollar a loaf. Sarah Tibbetts made it. Ain't it lovely! But it does seem funny to see you buyin' cake, Miss Hollins, when folks in town can't get enough of your sponge cake."

Olivia, too, was leaning across the table talking to her neighbor at the head. Her conversation held none of the aloofness of her preceding remark.

"I soiled all my dresses during Commencement," she was saying, "and so to-day I just had to wear this. You see, I got home late last night, and then I overslept this morning. Mamma woke me up at noon to tell me about coming here — that she 'd accepted for me. And this old linen was positively the only clean thing I had except a khaki and an evening gown. You 're too sweet for words, Prunella, in that buff!"

"But to wear heavy white linen, plain, like that!" Prunella sighed. "I'd give worlds to! You remind me somehow of that Copley print of Charity in the Church Parlors."

Olivia laughed, and put a chocolate between her firm white teeth. "I felt more like a Perry picture," she said, "at Commencement — so many caps and gowns, all so uniform and so — so instructive! Why, Mrs. Archibald! Awfully glad to see you! What do you hear from Marion?" And she rose and heartily shook Mrs. Archibald's little claw in its black cotton glove.

"Marion's well. I heard yesterday. Prunella knows I got a nice fat letter, don't you, Prunella? That's the advantage of bein' postmistress, ain't it? Marion's in Kwasi Twang now — one hundred and ninety-two patients in the mission hospital, and the school crowded. Seems just yesterday you an' Marion was in the Academy an' goin' skatin' with Dacre Welling. Seen Dacre yet? His grandfather's pretty poorly, they tell me."

Olivia's close ears grew quickly pink. "Not yet," she said, with a nice enunciation. "And now, Mrs. Archibald, you 'll take a cup of coffee with me, and we 'll drink to Marion. You see, you can have tea any time out of your grand

silver teapot." And she laughed down to Prunella, whose business was growing so lively she was not aware.

"How'd you find your mother?" Mrs. Archibald went on sociably. "Yes, cream and two lumps. Seemed to me last week at Society she did n't look like herself."

"Oh, Mamma seems well. Perhaps she was just tired that time," Olivia answered. "But, tell the truth, I've hardly had a real look at her. Last night there was such oceans to tell her, and this morning I overslept."

"Like as not she was tired an' sorter homesick for you, all alone in that great house. Lands! I know what that feelin' is! Now you're home—"

"It will be blissful," Olivia said joyously. "I'm just crammed with energy and I'll give Mamma a real rest—take all her cares away. Come to see us soon, Mrs. Archibald."

The crush had come. Prunella's breeze had stopped, too. Girls in white, with roses ill at ease in their high pompadours, crowded around the teapot, holding out their trays. Olivia's cups filed rapidly up to the urn from the ranks in which she had placed them. With her finger on the spigot, she gave her smiles and her

greetings, as the crowd pressed around and lingered.

"A B.S. not a B.A.," she laughingly corrected Miss Hollins, who, burdened with the raised cake and a pot of beans, paused to welcome and congratulate. "Thank you so much for your good wishes! How lovely Prunella looks! Come to see us!" And when Mrs. Clabby set down her jar of last year's chipped pear and a quarter of a gold cake, she let a cup run over while she exclaimed joyously, "Oh, Mrs. Clabby! I'm so glad to see you! How well you look! Yes, I'm feeling fine. Do come to see us!"

She wanted everybody to come to see them. It was glorious to come home so triumphantly and find so many friends. She felt as if she wanted to welcome every one in the village, not so much because she wanted to see them as because she longed to make them all feel her power and her energy and her high ambition. Even there in the crowd, watching the coffee bubbling into the cups, she was aware of her splendid self, of a greatness of some kind that was ahead of her, and that made her quite different from them all and very kind to them all — except to Dacre. She flushed as she remembered that to

him she had decided quite definitely not to be kind, that she had put him quite out of the new and brilliant and world-free career that was opening before her. Sweethearting was the way of mere boys and girls.

"She 's her father all over, square jaw, gray eyes, and all," Miss Hollins was saying in the doorway. "And if ever there was a well-meaning man!"

In a lull towards the end, when Prunella's breeze had again sprung up, and the garden sweetness was coming in through the small old windows, and Prunella herself had gone to buy whatever was left so as to help out supper, some one drew near Olivia's urn without giving her greeting or congratulation. It was a very slenderly made, delicately colored young person in a very unstylish white mull gown.

"It will be very good coffee that I am smelling," she said in a voice that was quite astonishingly not American, depositing a large strawberry shortcake on the table. "A cup, if you please, and I am not too late."

"It is not so good now, perhaps," Olivia apologized as she filled the cup, thinking the while of the blueness of the girl's eyes, and wondering how the strange use of the future

tense and the sweet Gaelic inflection chanced at a Fernfield food sale. She still wondered, after the stranger had taken her coffee and stood halfway down the table, sipping and looking out at the garden; but then the wonder was at the drooping Leghorn hat with its superabundant tulle trimmings, and the tulle strings tied under the round chin. Presently, the delicately colored young person put down her cup and her quarter, and took up her big shortcake.

"Here, in your American gardens, I miss much the sweet of the wallflower," she said, lifting her blue, blue eyes with the black lashes. "At my home, at this time of the evening, it does be coming in through the windows from the haggart. I thank you for the serving."

Prunella came just here, bearing half of a baked ham, a jar of last season's pears, and a loaf of brown bread.

"There!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "That ought to make a supper for six boarders! And Aunt Lou got raised cake and beans, did n't she?"

Olivia rose. "Who is that adorable girl?" she cried softly. "I could n't even be polite, she was so sweet."

Prunella put down the supper. "That 's Bride

Joyce, old Mike Joyce's niece. Is n't she Irish for you! And what a brogue!"

"She 's Gaelic, not Irish," Olivia said decisively, "and her intonation is lovely."

"I never thought of that," Prunella said simply. "But don't you stop to help clear up, Olivia."

"Why not?" Olivia answered briskly, piling cups.

CHAPTER III

MATCH TO WICK

It was the old hanging Chinese lamp in the hall that betrayed to Olivia her mother's face. Mrs. Ladd stood on a chair, reaching up with a flaring match. Olivia, coming around the wide curve of the stairway, after a late return from the food sale, stopped short. That moment shifted her life to leeward.

"O Mamma, let me! You 're tired!" she cried, running down.

"I am — a little," Mrs. Ladd admitted almost sharply as the match flared out and left them in darkness.

Olivia fumbled on the hall table among parasols and garden hats. "Where are the matches?" she asked breathlessly.

"Are n't they there? I 'll get some," her mother said, a little vaguely.

Olivia, left alone in the dark hall full of the night fragrances from the wide-open door, felt her heart in her throat. A wild fear chilled her, as if the darkness were full of terrors, the great empty house conscious. Something had changed

in her mother's face. Mrs. Archibald had said so. The lines around the mouth — up-and-down lines — Her mother's nose had never shown that shape before. Between the brows —

"I 'm coming," Mrs. Ladd called from the pantry.

Olivia drew a deep breath. Out through the wide-open front door, a young moon was riding high above the tall elms in the street. The woodbine at the parlor windows was heavily sweet.

" Guess you thought I 'd never come," Mrs. Ladd said, feeling for the sandpaper under the matchbox. "I entirely forgot to get matches this morning when I was down-street. You can reach up easily with your long arms." She spoke with a recovered cheerfulness that was almost too cheerful.

Olivia took the match and reached up, and presently threw into flickering relief red and blue Chinamen and purple pagodas.

"There!" her mother exclaimed gayly. " Now we 'll get some supper. It 's such a relief to have you at home, child. That pot of beans you brought from the sale will be just the thing. And lady cake, you say? Lou Hollins's cake? That 's always good, like Lou. And you say

Prunella was buying supper for the boarders? Poor little Prunella!"

They were going back to the kitchen, Mrs. Ladd's thin hand red over the match she was saving to light the dining-room lamp.

"I 'm not very hungry," Olivia said; then felt the loss of gayety in her own tone and added quickly, with a laugh, "Nibbling at receptions and teas and places always takes my appetite."

"But you must eat something, my dear; I have n't had you at the table with me since you came home. Some tea will do us both good. And then" — she was buttoning a white apron around her thin, flat waist — "then there 's much to talk about."

"Oceans!" Olivia exclaimed enthusiastically. "You have n't had a chance to tell me anything, I 've chattered so of myself. I 'll set the table and do it all, Mamma dear. I 'd love to. You rest."

"Why, you don't know where half the things are. How could you keep pots and pans in your head with a class poem? There! Don't take down the Canton plates. You 're not company, even if you are a Bachelor of Science." And Mrs. Ladd gave the fine, soft little laugh that

she had inherited with the Canton plates from the Adamses.

"Of course! How stupid of me!" Olivia laughed back, putting the familiar white and gold on the old mahogany table with its dish of garden roses. "But I'll soon get pots and pans in and poems out, Mamma. You'll see!"

"That's what there is to talk about," Mrs. Ladd said, her thin lips again a line after her smile. "But first I'll make the tea and get the bread and butter."

Olivia knew the napkin rings, but she absently reversed them; then stood holding the knives and forks indecisively.

"And the chipped pear you love so, Olivia, is in the small Mason jar on the third shelf in the pantry," Mrs. Ladd went on from the kitchen. "I have n't done any strawberries this year."

Olivia fumbled in the pantry.

"Foolish child! If it had been a bear, it would have bitten you!" her mother said, reaching over her shoulder. "You're not in the chemical laboratory,—just in a plain pantry. How sunburned your arms are, Olivia!"

"From rowing, and it's made them so hard and strong. I'm ready for any kind of work,

Mamma." And she again got her voice back into its natural tone, and found the glass dish and turned out the chipped pear.

Presently, tea was on the table, and the high lamp stood by the bowl of roses in the centre. Olivia, from her place at the foot, could see through one doorway into the long, unlighted double parlors, with the glint of a stray moonbeam on the girandoles at the far end. Through the other doorway was the hall, where a June bug bumped noisily against the Chinese lamp, and the moonlight lay across the threshold. Nothing in the big old house was as loud as a young frog outside in the matted lilybed.

Mrs. Ladd rebuttered a thin bit of bread. "Maids are out of the question," she was saying slowly. "The Polanders you would n't have in your house, and the Irish are so superstitious and impudent and full of airs, and so —"

"And you've done it all, Mamma? Since Christmas? Been quite alone, too? Why, I should never have gone to Philadelphia Easter if I'd dreamed — Why, Mamma! No wonder you are thin! Since Christmas, Mamma?"

"Yes-s — since Christmas. That is not a very long time. And I never was — corpulent. You are splendid and strong, are n't you, dear!

Ready for anything!" And she put down the bit of bread, and leaned back, stirring her tea.

Olivia was seeing fearfully the thin whiteness of the hair over the pale temples.

"Ready for anything and everything, Mamma," she said, "and come back just in time to take care of you. Everybody was so nice to-day and so glad to see me, and I told them I was going to take right hold and make you rest."

"So they were talking about me to-day, were they?" her mother interrupted quietly, with a faint little smile, "and you are going to make me rest!"

"Yes, Mamma, I am going to make you rest, and you must obey. I have such a fine scheme. Let 's shut up the house and go to Europe. Living 's awfully cheap there. Betty Preston says you can buy a huge cherry tart for ten cents. And Professor Chandler wants me to have at least a year in Göttingen, and you could rest, Mamma, and have music and art and things while I work — have all the things you 've wanted and never had, Mamma!"

In her eagerness, she pushed the dishes away and leaned across the table, her face close to the roses. The June bug had come in from the

hall, and bumped furiously against the old line engravings of Highland huntsmen and fishermen. "Let 's, Mamma dear," she pleaded.

Mrs. Ladd's spoon fell sharply to the floor. She did not pick it up. Instead, she clenched her hands on the arms of the high Chippendale chair.

"My dear," she began slowly, "when you hear that — when you hear that — Can you bear it, dear?"

Olivia laughed and grew as pale as her linen gown. "Bear it! What, Mamma? Anything!" And again she laughed and looked away from the hands gripping the chair, following the angry June bug.

"Bear to know that — that the place is n't ours any more — not a blade of grass on it ours — that the — the Irish hold it. Can you bear that, Olivia? Your father used to say I knew how to keep a secret! Can you bear it?"

The June bug fell into the great Canton bowl on the high mahogany sideboard. Olivia watched him fall. Her mother saw only her profile, then her full face very white, but in a smile.

"O Mamma! Bear it? Of course I can bear that! It might have been that you had some fearful thing the matter with you. Why,

Mamma, Mamma! Of course I can bear that! And I 'll pay it off. You 'll see!"

She had left her place and gone round to her mother, and knelt and caught the gray head close to her warm young bosom. "Those horrid, horrid Irish! If only the steamships would refuse to bring them! But, Mamma, I 'm so thankful it 's only that! And must we go right away? And who holds the mortgage?" She was keeping back, it seemed to her, thousands of tears that were turned into sharp, burning plans and schemes — plans and schemes that gleamed and stung as they whirled through her mind. And her arms were aware of the smallness of her mother's body in her warm, strong embrace.

"We have a year yet before the foreclosure — and the man — the man is that Joyce — that Michael Joyce — that great common, grasping man that has the Hollins place, Olivia. I 've never seen him — I would n't see him! But he just owns this valley." She was murmuring on out of Olivia's neck, and Olivia was patting the thin cheek, and understanding, and looking back over the ten years since her father's death, and putting two and two together, and biting her lips and telling herself to face it, and

murmuring, "Is that all, Mamma! Is that all?"

Presently, Mrs. Ladd drew away and leaned back and stared at the lamp. Olivia sat on her heels, as she had sat as a child, and stroked a thin hand. The hardest to bear was what she had never seen before — tears on her mother's cheeks. Not even when they had brought her father in from the high pasture drowned, not even when word had come that the only boy, Winthrop, had died in the Arizona mines, — not even then had Mrs. Ladd shed tears. Now she drew her eyes away from the lamp and got up slowly. When she was quite erect, and stood by her chair with her hand on the high back, she drew in a quick little breath.

"There is more," she said. "Perhaps it is better for you to know all now. Then you will see clearly. But you must not waste yourself feeling sorry for me. I cannot permit that. You must promise."

"That is the only thing that I cannot seem to bear, Mamma, — that you should suffer." Olivia had risen too. Her hands were bitterly cold. She could guess what was coming. She had guessed it before, from something Mrs. Clabby had said, but it had never been made a

certainty to her. The June bug buzzed angrily in the Canton bowl.

"It only seems that you cannot bear it," her mother was saying quite calmly. "Your father was a brilliant man, but he was not brave. You are both brilliant and brave. He drowned himself that day in the high pasture — because of — of his debts. My child! My child!"

For a minute, it seemed to Olivia that she was not brave: she could feel the blood all leave her heart in one great surge. "Oh! Oh!" she whispered and dropped her forehead on the seat of her mother's chair.

Mrs. Ladd stooped and kissed her hot, buried cheek.

"But he was brilliant — and lovable — and — and beautiful, my dear," she said. "That's all that you have to remember."

Olivia's shoulders shook.

"I have been teaching myself all these years what to remember — and what to forget," her mother went on. "Women have to — to discriminate and be loyal."

The girl looked up, white, but smiling faintly.

"I will discriminate, Mamma," she said.

"And hold your head very high, dear! That helps!"

Olivia got up and pushed back her hair, very erect against the glow of the lamp. She was thinking of a young maple tree she had seen twisted and contorted in a summer gale. That was herself to herself. She pressed her eyes, then opened them. The June bug flew airily, gayly out of the Canton bowl and away into the cool hall where the Chinamen and the pagodas were flickering in the night breeze.

Mrs. Ladd picked up the spoon. "Just pile the dishes in the pantry, dear. We 'll do the washing in the morning."

That night, out of the stillness of the softly blowing trees and the faint sound of the river down at the dam by the sawmill, Olivia listened to hear her mother's breathing from the room across the hall. Once she tiptoed to the door and strained her ears to find whether she was asleep. Then, not long after midnight had struck on the old white meeting-house, as she lay throbbingly still, planning and remembering, remembering and planning, she opened her eyes to find her mother's thin white figure at her bedside.

"My dear," she said, "there 's nothing more to tell you. You are braver than I thought you, and what 's even better, you have common sense. But there 's something to beg of you —

to implore you. To-morrow we must be quite practical. I 've never permitted myself any sentiment — about myself. You 've got your education. That 's been the point. The next thing will be your marriage. Marry out of the valley. Marry money and success and — and — and new, fresh blood. We old families — somehow we 've petered out, as your Uncle Josiah would express it."

Olivia sat up in bed suddenly and held out her arms. " It 's all over with Dacre, Mamma," she whispered. " It 's quite all over — if that 's what you fear. I told him so three weeks ago — that I hated his indolence. And now I want just you — bravest Mamma ! "

Mrs. Ladd had moved to the window and turned back the gently blowing curtain. " How thick the fireflies are in the orchard ! " she said. " Good-night, bravest child ! "

CHAPTER IV

THE CURL ON THE LIPS OF HER

ONIONS may be very successfully grown on selected areas of the heavy fine sandy loams or the light silty loams of the river meadows. Onions grown on muck soils, however, are poorer in quality than those grown on very rich sandy loam or silty loams, soils which, with efficient management, will bring highly satisfactory results."

"Muck soils!" Mr. Patrick Joyce repeated dreamily to himself, with a generous yawn. "Muck soils!"

It was desperately hot, that June afternoon, the day after the food sale. "Muck soils and light — silty — loams —" The words meant nothing to him in that sultry quiet. Once more he read them, then threw down the book. It was a sizable book, that Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture, and it made something of a noise as it landed on the bare floor of the almost deserted office in the big, bare town hall. But the noise was stimulating in the hot silence, and it aroused Mr. Joyce not only

to searching for his little black pipe in the pockets of his light serge coat, but also to getting up from his desk and wandering to the open window that looked out into the wide old street with its tall elms and its thick turf and its proud, high-roofed, ancient houses. There ought to have been something of a breeze through the room, for the door bearing the imposing announcement "Office of the Selectmen" stood wide open, inviting any and every stray breath of air to blow in from the long, dusty corridor.

The fragrance of the freshly lighted Burley stimulated the smoker into still further activity. After seating himself in the broad window sill, he began to whistle softly and musically an air that surely would not have been recognized by any average New Englander strolling by. But to the whistler it seemed mighty familiar, for he whistled it up and down and roundabout in flutelike variations, and then, as if much in love with his accomplishment, he sent it forth in a very engaging barytone, into the very bird's nests in the elm outside.

"Would God I were a little apple blossom
To float and fall from off the twisted bough,"

he sang, and leaned his dark head against the window and looked up at the blue above the tree-tops and then absently out at the grassy, elm-shaded path that served as sidewalk.

> "Or would I were a little burnished apple
> For you to pluck me —"

He stopped. He had an audience, or had had. Two girls coming slowly across the street from the post-office looked up a moment, then quickly away. Mr. Joyce took a long pull at his little black bogwood with its carved shamrocks. He knew one of the girls. It was Prunella Loomis, the postmistress. What would she be thinking and him wishing himself a little burnished apple! "For you to pluck me!" It was comical, sure! She had on the pink calico he had already wished to tell her became her well, and she wore those odious straw cuffs to keep her sleeves clean, and a large white apron with deep pockets. Usually he saw only her serious, official face through the post-office window, and he rarely had opportunity for so leisurely a contemplation of her ever-hurrying person. Now, no doubt, she was in a great hurry and was being detained by the tall young woman he did not know, for she carried a large and bril-

liant can of tomatoes, and she was headed up the street for home. He was just beginning to grow quite aware of the detaining person when she let Prunella go, and vanished herself around the corner of the town hall. As he set himself to relighting his bogwood, he was thinking of the nice, tanned look of her neck and cheek between her white gown and her Panama.

> "That you might pluck me, passing by so cold,
> And sun and —"

There were steps in the corridor, not a man's steps. Could it be Mrs. Clabby come so early about the intrusions of Mrs. Rimooski's chickens into her tomato patch?

"Please, is Mr. Joyce in?" said a new and hesitating voice at the door.

He sprang to his feet, his hand to his hatless head for a salute, his pipe back into his pocket.

"He is in, indeed!" he cried, flushing from his square chin up over the freckled bridge of his nose right into his roughened hair. And it took a good deal of a shock for a heart to pump such a flush into so big and strong a fellow.

She came a step across the threshold, clutching tight a very grand little green morocco bag that had been one of her graduation presents.

"Will you tell him, please, that I wish to speak to him?" she said. "Here is my card." And she held it forth formally in a white-gloved hand.

"But — but I am Mr. Joyce," he hesitated, buttoning his coat. "And whatever you will be wishing to say, very gladly will I hear."

If he had studied women as he had studied the musty volumes in the old university library in Dublin, he would have felt her mood to be a very haughty one, and the little shadow under her eyes and the red spot on each cheek to mean that this was the greatest effort of her life, and the most hateful. But being only a beginner in the lore of womankind, he could read nothing, and he did nothing but push towards her a chair and cast about in his thought for words that did not have so much of the brogue. She lifted her fine, dark brows. "Surely, you — you are not the President of the Board of Selectmen," she said, a little scornfully.

"My word, no! You will be wanting my uncle, Michael Joyce. It is in Boston he is. And I am his clerk, minding the place till he is coming home again."

"Oh!" she said coldly. "Then it is hardly

worth while. Will he be away long, do you think?" Cold as she seemed, she had caught his fashion of saying "clark" for "clerk," and she was seeing the strange old silver ring that he wore on the hand that offered the chair.

"It is of that I am not at all certain, when he will be coming back," he said. "It is for a ship that he is waiting. She will be bringing young men for the fields, and already she is late because of the gales. But" — he hesitated, and looking up, met her eyes squarely — "but could I not be helping you? It is much of the business of the town that I mind for my uncle."

She sat down in the chair he offered. "Perhaps — perhaps I might tell you what it is," she said, her face grown even more proud, more grave. "It is very important and I am very late. And then, as soon as your uncle comes, you could tell him — and it would save time."

Three o'clock rang out from the meeting-house spire high among the elms.

"Why not!" he exclaimed. "It is what will be best to do, to tell me and I will write it all down and give it at once to my uncle." And he threw back the roll-top desk and stood leaning upon it. For the life of him he could not guess what she wanted of his uncle, this very royal

young woman with the little frown between her eyes. Again she was handing him her card. "In anything — whatever — I will be glad to serve you, Miss Ladd," he added slowly. Now he was remembering and recollecting. It was the Ladd farm on which his uncle held the big mortgage.

"Thank you," she said formally. "I have come to apply for the North Fernfield District School for next fall. Miss Loomis, my friend, tells me that the present teacher has resigned to go to the city."

He dropped into the big revolving chair at the desk, and, reaching to a pigeonhole, drew out a file of application blanks. "It is what you must do, to fill out these questions," he explained, drawing out a leaf of the desk in front of her and handing her his fountain pen.

She was taking off her gloves in the most businesslike fashion, and bending over the blank he had spread before her. And as she read, he sat looking at the top of her Panama and then furtively at her slim, sunburned hands, and her lashes on her hot cheeks. In the back part of his mind, the apple-blossom song was still singing itself.

"Or would I were —"

She began to write. Joyce went to the window and stood looking out. He was thinking that she was too amazingly good-looking not to be as haughty as a queen. At any rate, she had relaxed a little. And of course now he knew very well who she was. She was the daughter of that cold, proud widow with the big farm and the fine old house, on which his uncle held so heavy a mortgage. No wonder she was cold! And small wonder if she hated him and his uncle. But she was a plucky one! And the curl on the lips of her!

"Are there many trying for the place?" she asked presently, handing him the pen without looking at him.

"It is what I have quite forgotten, just how many," he hesitated. "But I will see. These two days since I am minding the place, not so many have been coming." And he reached into another pigeonhole and drew out a fat pile of blanks in a rubber. "It is a good many, is it not?" he said. "Almost all the young ladies in the valley seem to be thinking they can teach school. And to me it seems a very hard thing, to teach school."

She had risen and was drawing on her gloves.

"Of course," she said, "I have only the

ghost of a chance — because — because — I have n't any — any pull. It 's all pull, they say." She lifted her brows a little disdainfully and snapped her glove together. Prunella had told her it was all pull.

"I do not at all know how it is decided," he explained, looking up from her application. "You see, I am not long in this country — only since January — and it is not yet quite a year since I myself am out of the university."

She gave him a long, wholly curious glance. "You!" she said. "What university?"

"Dublin. And it 's not much for looks compared to your fine millionaire universities here. But God bless it, just the same!"

She snapped her other glove together. The red spots glowed in her cheeks. "Here in the valley," she said slowly, "getting a position is n't at all a matter of university training or even of qualification. It 's wholly a matter — of — of nationality. I have very little chance, you see! Thank you, though, for the trouble."

He had flushed hotly as he followed her words, and had ready no answer whatever when she turned and went down the corridor, leaving him bowing at the desk.

Into the light ring of her footsteps came a

heavier tread. He did not heed it, so hard was he thinking of her taunt.

"Well, Mr. Joyce, ain't your uncle back yet?" Mrs. Clabby exclaimed asthmatically. "Seems like we've got enough foreigners in this valley without him having to go to Boston to welcome more. What's Livvy Ladd been here about? Polander chickens been running in her mignonette beds?"

Joyce offered her a chair. "It is another nationality that will be troubling Miss Ladd," he said, with a little smile. "And now about Mrs. Rimooski?"

CHAPTER V

SWEETHEARTING

MRS. LADD'S delicately withered face, in its frame of honeysuckle trellis, smiled up the street as Olivia came swinging along the path. The smile was there to meet and dispel the bitterness of the afternoon's experience, and as well to prepare the child for another that promised as much bitterness, though of a different kind. She pushed open the sagging iron gate and stepped out. Olivia waved her hand. Her figure was her best point, after all, her mother was thinking, though her hair was nice too — her father's hair, dry, dull gold.

"I've done it!" she called gayly. "Filled out a blank with a long list of my accomplishments." And she caught up to her mother and put an arm around her waist.

"You can get it, you think?"

"Get it!" Olivia laughed. "I've just about one one-hundredth of a chance. A great pile of applications, all Irish. Reduce one chance in a hundred to its lowest terms. That's mine, Mamma."

"Of course! What else could we expect, even if your grandfather did establish that school! But who knows!" And she looked up at Olivia's sparkle and color as they turned in the gate and up the flagged path between the irises and the smoke-bushes.

"And then," the girl went on gayly, "I spoiled even my fraction of a chance. I was rude — but I told the truth, Mamma. And it did me a lot of good."

"Olivia! Not rude, my dear! And to an inferior! You saw him — that Mr. Joyce? Not rude to him!"

Olivia laughed again, and dropped on the bench in the syringa crescent halfway up to the house. "Not exactly to him," she said. "But to an odious, self-satisfied, irreproachable young man who said he was Mr. Michael Joyce's nephew and 'clark,' and that he 'minded the place' in his uncle's absence. Think of it, Mamma! Think of 'minding the place' in our dear old town hall! Lovely, is n't it!" And she threw her hat and smart gloves on the grass. "Sit down, Mamma! Do! Is n't this syringa deliciousness!"

"Was he impertinent, dear — or familiar? I should not have let — "

"Oh, niver a bit of it, sure! And he volunteered the information that he was a university man — Dublin, where Goldsmith and Burke and that crowd went. Imagine it, Mamma!"

"But to be rude, Olivia! And to a young man, an inferior at that!"

"Why, it was this way, you see. I filled the blank as he told me to do — and then — then I just told him the truth — that I knew perfectly well that I had n't the ghost of a chance — that here in the valley it 's all pull — and Irish pull at that. Prunella told me so. Don't look so horrified! I 'm glad I did, Mamma!"

"Olivia! In those words! And those are just the very people that we can't afford to offend, you and I. Was he angry? What did he do?"

"Nothing, absolutely, except to fold my application blank very exactly, and then snap it under the rubber band. And then when I finished, he bowed and — and he had colored. At any rate, it 's done, and it 'll do them good to know that we know their tricky ways."

"But, my dear, even if we admit that we know, we condescend. We of another race and class, we are n't to know or to understand such methods. I should n't have exposed — "

"Oh, it was all quite safe. And he was n't

really half bad! Besides, it was an adventure. I must write Betty Preston about it. She 'll think it rich." And she laughed again, and leaning back, pulled down a long spray of syringa and sniffed the blossoms. "Now let me get you a chair. This bench is n't comfortable. And let 's camp here and I 'll read you the class poem."

"I wish we might," her mother said uncertainly, "but there 's another — another adventure waiting for you. Major Welling has sent for you. That Stefan Posadowski stopped here this afternoon with the message. He 's the nephew of the man that 's living at the Welling place."

The syringa spray sprang back and left Olivia's cheeks some of its whiteness.

"For me? Why? What for? Why does n't the Major come here?"

"I know nothing, dear, except what the young man said, in his broken English — that the Major was ill and begged that you would come. It 's too bad — just now."

"The poor dear old Major! Shall I go, Mamma? Do I have to? I 've always been such friends with the Major. But ought I to now, Mamma? Is it best to?" Her chin was in her

palm, her elbow on her knee, and she was frowning at the blue periwinkles under the syringa bushes. Mrs. Ladd had risen and turned towards the house.

"Yes, you ought to, Olivia," she said slowly. "I took a liberty. I told him to say you would come this afternoon. It may be too late if you wait. There have been other shocks." She started on, then came back. "After a while — you 'll see that it has been best to go even now. We owe it to the Major. I 'll get you a sunshade. It 's hot through those onion fields."

"A good — good deal — is — is happening, Mamma!" she stammered; and then hid her face in her arms on the back of the bench and burst into a storm of tears.

"A good deal, dear! I 'm so sorry! I 've tried to hold it off," her mother said, and then went lingeringly towards the house.

On and on she sobbed in the fragrant quiet of the syringa crescent, wildly, despairingly. A little breeze from the west sprang up and cooled the back of her neck, but her cheeks burned and her sleeves were wet with hot tears. Not once had she given way till now, not once since last night's revelations. The mortgage, the suicide,

not a tear. All night she had lain wide awake, dry-eyed, hot-cheeked, planning, planning, remembering that Prunella that very afternoon had told of the vacancy in the district school, then planning, planning to get the school at once, to run the farm, to pay off the mortgage. She would do it. She could do it. And Dacre was done with and out of her life. The old foolish boy-and-girl love was dead and done with for her. Now it was work and care and life — real life! And to give her mother some peace and joy after the long years in which she had kept the secret. So the night had taught Olivia, and the morning had sent her, quickly bathed and dressed, down to the kitchen to get breakfast. That was the practical beginning of the new life — coffee and toast and boiled eggs, and a heavy-eyed, surprised mother in the fragrant morning airiness of the dining-room. Then had come unpacking, straightening, settling of college belongings in home quarters — piles of notebooks and textbooks in new companionship with the old half-calf in her father's library. And all the while there had been much brave, merry talk of securing the district school — how she would cram those youngsters! — and much to do laughing away Mrs. Ladd's bit-

terness. Then had come the faring forth to ask Prunella where to apply, and then the break into Mr. Patrick Joyce's apple-blossom song and his meditations upon the culture of onions. All this — it seemed a lifetime since college — and no giving way till now in the syringa crescent, when the old Major's message and the thought of Dacre's immanence set free torrents of tears.

A catbird swung on the pine tree calling shrilly. For a moment, a cloud covered the sun. Olivia lifted her hot, wet face and pushed the combs into her loosened hair. Mrs. Ladd was coming down the porch steps with a green-lined pongee umbrella and a tinkling glass of cold milk. The umbrella was one that had come home with her boy's things from Arizona.

"I let you cry; you needed it," she said. "It's the best thing you could have done. And to cry is no sign of lack of courage. It's quite physical — just like coughing or sneezing. It's a comfort to remember that when one is really brave. And this milk will cool you. The cow has been eating the orchard clover."

And presently, cooled, deeply quieted, and infinitely saddened and wearied, Olivia went out again through the sagging gate under the honeysuckles, crossed the grassy street, and

took the dusty path across the onion fields. Right and left they stretched, hot and shimmering, their pale-green level broken only with the crawling weeders astride the rows. Scarlet and blue flared the dresses of the women, as they worked or stopped to suckle the babies spending the day afield in the baby carriages, tended only by those too old or too young to weed. Miles upon miles of it to right and left — green shimmer and crouching figures. Then the brown and green of newly set tobacco fields, the long arklike tobacco barns; then the far hills hazy in the afternoon heat. Beyond the river, above the western hills, great cumulus clouds were piling up purplish mountains, and a hot wind rimpled the onion fields into shallow green seas.

Olivia went on swiftly under the pongee umbrella, sometimes through clouds of aimless yellow butterflies. For a mile ahead of her, the road ran straight and level and glaring among the onions; then dipped into the low fields that the river was eating away; then rose again into the greenness of Major Welling's orchard and garden, with the high old chimneys and worn shingles among the elms and pines on the river-bank. Very swiftly, indeed, Olivia was going along, in spite of the heat, saying over and over

to herself, "What shall I do if he is there! What shall I do if his eyes pain me as they did three weeks ago! And if he should beg! And what is it that the poor dear old Major wants? Is he going to scold me because I have hurt his boy? What shall I do if he is there! It is terrible to be so sorry! One cannot be sensible when one is so sorry! Oh, I wish that we were little children — little tiny, wee bits of children, Dacre and I!"

She did smile wanly at a beady-eyed, black-haired Polish baby that pulled back from its mother's full breast and looked at her as she passed. The baby kicked and crowed and then fell to tugging again, and the mother laughed and looked at Olivia and pressed the little head close to her bosom. "If he should dare to kiss me again, what should I do!" Olivia was thinking as she smiled back.

When she dipped into the low grounds among more yellow butterflies, and climbed the slope to the orchard gate, great cloud shadows were beginning to float over the fields. The old gray house in its old trees lay quite in shadow, and the poplars along the river showed white. Then on she went, over the familiar stile on the orchard wall, through the tall seeding grass

and the clover, under the gnarled and knotted trees. There was the Baldwin tree where she and Dacre had had their seats and read the fairy-books. In that Greening tree they had found the oriole's nest. Then she came to the currant bushes and the raspberries and blackberries that edged the garden, all rank and overgrown against the rotting fence; then made her way through what had been the kitchen garden, now weeds and lawless rhubarb and horseradish.

In the back yard, under the Bartlett pear tree by the well, a Polish woman sat, sewing large patches on a red shirt. Behind her there were the gray roofs, the many-paned windows, and under the trees the gray shine of the river.

"Oh, I be much glad you come!" she cried at sight of Olivia. "Our boy Stefan, he say you come. He so sick, ze ole man. I not work thiz day in my man's field, ze ole man so sick." Her heavy face had grown suddenly gentle. "He glad to see you. I show you."

"I know the way quite well," Olivia was beginning, then stopped and said pleadingly, "Oh, do, please!" A faint odor of cigarettes had blown to her.

"He so sick he not spick much, ze ole man.

He not get well zis time, Doctor say," the woman was going on softly, as they went round the house, past the lily bed and the ragged lilacs and the great tangled wistaria that fell in purple and white cascades from cornice to ground. In the uncut grass, the roses rioted at will, and the long-neglected woodbine and coral honeysuckle almost hid the tottering summerhouse on the bank above the river.

The Polander stopped on the flagstone at the front door, and motioned towards wistaria and summerhouse and river. "All so sweet! All so sweet!" she said softly. "I no change it. Our Stefan, he love all what is pretty. An' ze ole man he love it so. To die is hard when all so pretty."

Her last words, soft as they were, made almost an echo in the great bare hall, with the gracious stairway that seemed curving up into further loneliness.

"He in ze war-room," she whispered. "He not want to die upstairs."

She stopped at the familiar door, listening. The parlor doors were closed. Olivia stopped too, breathless, with flaming cheeks. Down the stairs, with wagging tail and a little whine, flew Ben, Dacre's Gordon setter, and licked her

hands and sniffed her skirts joyously. Everywhere there was the wistaria sweetness and in it the faint fragrance of cigarettes. On the hat-rack hung a white sweater, a Panama with a blue band, and the Major's gold-corded veteran's hat. It was quite still except for the wind in the pines and the far rumble of thunder.

The Polish woman opened the door and peeped into the room. "He all right. He mek a little sleep. You go in," she whispered.

Olivia went softly across the threshold. The familiar room cut her with its usualness — the windows looking across the river to the hills, the walls covered with maps of the battlefields and the pictures of generals, and with swords and rifles and other army belongings. There, opposite the door, resplendent as ever, hung the portrait of the Major as first lieutenant, brave and gallant and smiling. In the old Academy days, when she and Dacre were sweethearts, and there were school frolics, what brave story-telling of heroes there was in the war-room!

In the armchair by the empty fireplace, with an army blanket over his knees, dozing, with hanging head, sat the Major. His face was white and drawn, and his shriveled hands lay limply in his lap.

"Major! Major Welling!" Olivia said gently. "I'm so glad to see you. You were good to send for me."

He opened his eyes heavily with a feeble smile. "That you, Mary Ladd?" he whispered weakly, trying to rise and then falling back. "That husband of yours with you? It's a cold day."

"Oh, don't try to get up, Major!" Olivia cried. "It's only I, Olivia. It's not Mamma. It's only I." And she knelt at his side and put her warm hand on his chill ones.

Her touch seemed to rouse him. "Of course! Why—why, I must have been dozing. I thought it was your mother and—and—your father. We're pretty near run out—the old place and I." And again he smiled faintly and stared at the empty fireplace.

"And was there something you wanted me to do for you, Major?" Olivia went on softly, stroking his hand and watching his pale face fearfully.

Suddenly he drew a sharp breath and, pulling himself erect in his chair, faced her. It seemed to her that she should freeze with the cold blueness of his eyes.

"Do!" he muttered hoarsely. "Do! For

God's sake, stop doing! Let the boy alone! Don't — don't make a damned fool of him. Your father — your father ruined his father. One generation is enough, by God! Let him alone, or else make a man of him. Don't make a fool of him and — tell him he can paint. Make a man of him, if you can, or by — " He fell back in his chair, gasping, his limp hands fumbling in his lap.

For a black minute, Olivia sat staring at the ashes on the hearth, her head against the old blanket on his knee. Then out of what seemed to her depths of terror, she found herself running from the room, out through the gray, windy hall, past the closed doors, round the house by the ragged lilacs.

The Polish woman was carrying a dripping bucket from the well.

" Go to him, quick! He is very ill! " Olivia cried. " Quick! Perhaps he will die."

Then on she ran, through the garden, against the rising wind, sobbing without tears. " I am not brave any more. I am a coward not to stay and take care of him," she was crying to herself. " But he was so terrible — and what he said is so terrible! "

In the orchard a big drop of rain splashed

her face. The storm was almost upon her. But at the stile over the orchard wall, she paused for breath and dropped on the lower step and rested her head on the stone. It was good, the storm outside, to quiet the storm within. Another big drop splashed coolly on her cheek. "Make a man of him, if you can. Your father ruined his father. One generation is enough," she kept hearing above the throbbing of her heart. Suddenly, something flashed sharp into the dark of her thought. Her cheeks glowed hot. She drew a long breath and lifted her face for more cool drops.

"Now — now I must be his! And he must be — be mine! He is the atonement!" she was swiftly realizing. "I owe it to him — for my father's sake. The old love has meant just this! I will love him always and that will make a man of him. And I — I will be brave like Mamma and keep the secret."

And presently, when she heard him back in the garden calling to her, and knew that he was running to overtake her, she did not try to escape, as she had planned she would do. She was no longer afraid except that her heart would stifle her with its beating.

He came flying through the long grass, call-

ing softly to her. She kept her face close in her hands, but she knew well how the apple boughs brushed his crinkled, tawny hair, he was so tall, and she felt without seeing the light in his lazy eyes.

"You, Olivia! You, darling! I did n't know you 'd come till you 'd gone. I was in the studio painting. That chump of a woman told me. Sweetheart! Sweetheart! You see, it had to be!"

And when he knelt at her side and put his arms around her, she let him draw her close and kiss her eyes, her hair, her neck.

"You see it differently, don't you, sweet, now that you 're back and we are n't together as we 've always been?" he was murmuring close to her ear. "We just must be together — always. And it 's like old boy and girl times, your coming to see Grandfather. And it 's going to be like old times, always, is n't it, darling — only better?" And she let him lift her chin and look into the very depths of her clear eyes, and kiss her lips long, throbbingly.

"Now you 'll come back till the storm 's over, and then I 'll hitch —" he was going on.

But she drew away and got up quickly. "Oh, no!" she said breathlessly. "I cannot go back.

But you must go back at once to the poor sick old man. He is so fearfully ill. I will run home and send the doctor. It is not far and I do not mind the rain."

"Oh, Grandfather will be all right. Mrs. Wieniaski knows how to manage him. He 's been that way twice before and got all right. And you do see differently, darling? I can't be anything without you. You see differently — sure?"

She put her hands on his shoulders and gave him a long look. She need n't be afraid of him any more, this great, beautiful, boyish sweetheart of hers. He was the atonement for the other generation. And she, too, could keep her secret.

"Oh, yes!" she said, with a quick breath. "I see quite differently. You can be very sure, dear. It is right that I shall be — be all yours — if I can make a man of you. I must not be yours unless I can make a great man of you."

"Darling, you can make anything of me — if you will love me," he murmured. "And now I will go home with you and — "

She gave him a little push and drew away.

"Oh, no, no! You must go back to him quickly," she cried. "And remember that it

is a secret from every one—above all, from Mamma — until I — I have succeeded. Yes, yes! Just once more!" And again she felt his passionate lips on hers. Then she turned and ran down the path into the low grounds. Ahead of her, the rain was already sweeping over the wide, thirsty fields.

CHAPTER VI

ICING

DIED last night! What a mercy!" Miss Hollins exclaimed, folding in the flour. It was the ticklish point in her sponge cake, that folding in. "The Lord was kind to take him before things got worse."

"Worse!" Prunella, in a big blue kitchen apron, was shooting almonds out of their wet brown skins. "How could they be worse?" Between the ten o'clock and the noon mail she had time to be domestic.

"Well, it would be worse to see Dacre more of a failure than he is, and the old place gone to those Polanders." Miss Hollins's pink chambray sleeves came only to the elbows of her finely shaped, aristocratic arms, and her plump white neck showed cool and comfortable in a delicate surplice.

"If Olivia should marry him now! I'm so afraid she will. He 's crazier than ever about her."

"God forbid!" Miss Hollins said solemnly, pouring the foamy batter into the buttered

tins. "This makes the ten fifteen-cent sponge-cakes, does n't it, Prunella? It 's a wicked shame he 's so good-looking. It 's an unfair advantage. But Olivia has judgment. And died last night! Poor old Major! How happy he was Memorial Day! Little thought we 'd so soon be decorating his grave. I 've been meaning to go out to see him ever since he had the second shock."

"But he would n't have known you, Aunt Lou. Dacre was in the post-office yesterday morning and he said he 'd been in a stupor ever since the storm ten days ago. That was the third shock, Dacre says. Dacre keeps getting letters from France and from steamship companies. Now I suppose he 'll go right away unless — unless Olivia — "

"Mercy! Don't talk about such a thing, Prunella. Olivia 's got better sense, after all her college. But I do take myself to task that I did n't get out to see him."

"But how could you, Aunt Lou, with extra boarders and all these orders from the Exchange. You just could n't, that 's all."

"Those almonds ready, Prunella? Yes, I could have. These days, we spend so much time thinking how little time we have, that we

lose a lot. Two almond sponge, three cocoa sponge, one marshmallow layer, and four plain." And she counted the fragrant loaves on the table by the kitchen window that looked on the rose-patch. The rose-patch was the one merely ornamental part of the little back garden. The rest was exclusively devoted to Prunella's vegetables, worked at between mail-times. Prunella permitted herself and her aunt no merely æsthetic indulgences. But nevertheless, the table by the other window was a thing of beauty in spite of Prunella's severity; for she herself sat at the side of it with the breeze blowing the soft little curls around her small ears and the heat of the kitchen deepening the pink of her cheeks. And on the top of the table there were many little white and yellow and blue bowls full of the luscious icings, all, except the chocolate, in delicate pastel shades, cocoa, pistache, strawberry, coffee. Prunella's nearest approach to an æsthetic gratification was concocting and stirring the icings that were the distinguishing glory of her aunt's cakes in the Wellfield Woman's Exchange.

Miss Hollins was spreading the cocoa-icing, smoothing it back and forth with sure strokes. "At any rate, I'll go over this afternoon. Like

as not, Mary Ladd is there, taking hold. Hope to mercy she is! There 's no one else, except the G. A. R. But there 's precious few veterans left to manage the funeral. Sticks, this icing. It 's the heat."

"But if Olivia should!" Prunella repeated, stirring strawberry. "I 'd almost hate her. Just because you love a man — or think you do — it does n't make any difference what kind he is! I never would, I know that!"

"You don't know what you 'd do, Prunella. What time is that striking? Eleven?"

"Yes, eleven. Well, you did n't, Aunt Lou. It 's all a matter of common — "

"Never had a chance! I don't know what I should have done! Just as foolish things as any other woman, like as not!" Miss Hollins interrupted, with a laugh and a faint flush under her delicate skin. "Never had a beau in my life. How could I? I had no time for beaus. First your grandmother ill for five years, then your mother for eight, and then — then the old place gone and you to bring up — bless you, Prunella — and — and not a cent to buy — buy hairpins. But lots of blessings instead of beaus!" And as she reached for the strawberry, she kissed the girl's cheek quickly.

Prunella endured it.

"Eggs out, are n't they, Aunt Lou?" she said abruptly. "What 'll you do? And the week-end boarders coming to-night."

"I know it. And I 've tried everywhere except that Polish woman at the Wellings' — that Mrs. Wieniaski. She usually has plenty. Once before in a pinch I got some there. I could send Robbie —"

"Don't, please! Please don't, Aunt Lou. Somehow, eggs from Polanders — and from those Polanders in the Major's place, it 's worst of all."

"You 're too fussy, Prunella. And sometimes you actually sound sentimental. They are a very decent lot, those Wieniaskis. Eggs are dirt-proof anyhow. And that Stefan 's as good-looking a fellow as there is in town, except that young Irishman. None of our own boys left for comparisons, except Dacre, and you never know where he is long enough to put your finger on him to compare him."

Prunella was unbuttoning her apron. "Well, I know that I am not sentimental, of all things," she said decidedly. "That young Posadowski is — is impertinent. The other morning I actually caught him putting a bunch of wild flag on my

desk. The audacity, Aunt Lou! I threw them into the waste-basket. And he 's always getting rolls of foreign music through the mail, and queer-looking Polish books. Such airs! And if he 'd only cut his — "

She stopped. There was a knock at the front door. " I 'll see," she went on, drying her hands on the roller towel. " I 've got to go soon anyhow. If it 's Mrs. Clabby, what shall I do ? Say you 're dead ? "

" Prunella ! Ask her in, of course. She would n't stay."

" Would n't she ! "

But it was not Mrs. Clabby. Miss Hollins, peeping through the crack of the dining-room door, gave a sigh of relief ; then sighed again and frowned. That the visitor was Bride Joyce was even more of an interruption than if it had been Mrs. Clabby. It was n't easy to welcome the people who had got possession, however honestly and fairly, of the home of one's ancestors. The Joyces were the only people she had permitted herself to avoid among all the newcomers in the valley. Prunella simply ignored them. And yet it was foolish and wicked to be resentful at the girl's coming, Miss Hollins was telling herself, still at the crack.

Prunella, as she pushed open the screen door, was having a little struggle, too.

"Oh, Miss Joyce! It 's you!" she said. "Won't you come in?"

"No, thank y'! I 'll just stop here. And y're that busy. My brother says that niver has he seen so busy a body as y' are." And she smiled under the wide straw hat tied beneath her round chin with ribbons as blue as her eyes. "And it 's y'r time I am taking, and me coming to ask y' a great favor."

"Oh, there 's lots of time," Prunella said, a little less frigidly. "Do come in out of the heat."

So the unwelcome visitor came in and put her little willow basket on the floor at her side when she seated herself in Prunella's great-great-grandfather's Sheraton armchair. Had Mrs. Ladd seen her so sitting, she would have found the incongruity painful and significant, but had Dacre Ladd beheld her, he would have liked the composition and the coloring, the nice tone of her homespun linen dress and the fresh pink and white of her skin.

"It 's like this, y' see," she was saying. "I 've come to ask if y'r aunt, Miss Hollins, would be so good as to spare me a bit of cake. I 'd be so

thankful to her. What with me staying last night at Major Welling's, my brother and me, and Uncle Mike's telephoning that he'll be bringing the School Board to dine, and me so sleepy with the sitting up and all, and our Nora with a toothache on her, there's not much they'll be having t' eat. And so perhaps Miss Hollins will be letting me have a bit of cake. 'T was Mrs. Clabby said so."

Prunella had melted enough to laugh. "Mrs. Clabby told you, did she?" Then, grown quickly serious, "And you were at the Wellings' last night?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, quite simply. "Just as soon as the news came, Uncle Mike told Patrick and me to go. He was quite alone, was the young man, except for the Polish people. And at home, in Leenane, in our country, always when there was grief or trouble, and no one to be minding things — always we went. Always there is much that a woman should be doing. The men do not always be thinking of — of the tender things." Her eyes had filled quickly.

"Was not Mrs. Ladd there?" Prunella asked, again a little cold.

"Not till the morning, and then so pale and

quiet. Last night there were only my brother and I, and the man they sent for. It was that lonely in the big house! And Patrick stayed close by the young gentleman. It seemed to comfort him that Pat was there, he was that beside himself. And Pat was telling him about when our father died, three years ago, at home, in Leenane. And there being no woman in the family, it was enough to break y'r heart. But the Polish woman was good, and her nephew helped me, and we cut great boughs of syringa and wistaria and woodbine, till the house was that sweet! It was moonlight and quite easy the cutting. And then this morning, what with the flags to drape, and the swords and the brass buttons on the uniform to be shining — Ah, there was a plenty to do, and me that sleepy and stupid in the doing!" And she smothered a little yawn behind her slender, finely shaped hand. "And so, if, please, I could have the bit of cake," she finished. "Y' see, I 've not been minding the house as I should."

Prunella drew a long breath. "I 'll see," she said, rising. "I 'm not at all sure. Was Miss Ladd there?"

"Oh, no! Not in the house. I was after seeing her in the garden, with the young gen-

tleman. She came with the flowers. And then Mrs. Ladd went with the young gentleman to see about the grave. It does seem hard to be having to bury him, a grand soldier, out in the fields. But Patrick says it 's where the family are sleeping, and it's best to lie with one's own, is it not?"

"Of course," Prunella answered. "But the hideous thing is that the foreigners have —" She remembered and stopped.

The foreigner held out her hand quickly. "Ah, do not be minding me!" she cried softly. "It 's often and often that Uncle Mike and Patrick and I are saying how hard it is for the old places to go. Everywhere at home, in my country, it is the same, the old places are going. We know. And always — always, we will be tender." Again her blue eyes had filled and her delicate color came swiftly. "Will you not always remember that — that we — we are tender?" she pleaded.

"Oh, thank you!" Prunella said, flushing too. "I'm sure you are. I 'll see about the cake." She was thinking how glad she was that their family had been sensible and buried in the town cemetery.

Miss Hollins was waiting at the dining-room

door with a large tray of cakes. Her face, too, was flushed.

"I've heard it all," she whispered excitedly. "I was listening at the crack. It was my right to do so. Don't be un-Christian, Prunella. Of course she shall have cake. I'm not a heathen."

"All that, Aunt Lou!"

"All she needs, child. Think of the predicament. And School Boards and Selectmen eat like ogres. You take them in — there! And tell her there's no charge."

"No charge! Oh, Aunt Lou! And that big bill for the new range!"

"I could n't, Prunella — from her. Do as I say."

But the question of charge was seemingly of not the smallest concern to the visitor. After exclamations of delight at the color and the lightness and the fragrance, she went on with perfect unconsciousness, "And perhaps you'll let me be taking them just as they are, on the tray. Such beauties they are! And my basket so wee. And then right away I'll send down the tray t' y' by one of the lads from the farm. And you will tell y'r aunt, please, how very thankful I am."

When she had gone, Prunella flew back to the dining-room.

"Took them all, and not a word about paying," she said grimly. "What do you think of that, Aunt Lou?"

Miss Hollins wiped her glasses on the edge of her apron. "It looks to me as if — as if she were a lady," she answered. "You wait and see, Prunella. Don't misjudge."

Prunella did not have to wait long. When she came home to dinner, Miss Hollins beckoned her excitedly into the kitchen.

"See there!" she said in a triumphant tone. "I told you so. And Jane Clabby must have told her my prices. She's sent just the right amount, to a cent. I know the very patch those berries grew in."

On the icing-table stood the tray, brimming full of big strawberries. In the middle lay a small envelope.

"We must be fair, Prunella, even if it does hurt."

"I didn't know the Irish ever had crests," Prunella said critically, putting down the envelope.

"Nor I. But why not!" And Miss Hollins picked up the envelope and held it close to her

near-sighted eyes. "And in good taste. They are n't half so unlike us as the Polanders are."

That afternoon, just before Prunella ran home to hoe the beans, Olivia looked through the opening into her cage. The post-office was in one corner of the general store, opposite the candy and notion counter, and flanked with seeders and pitchforks and fertilizers. In mid-afternoon Prunella's corner was usually deserted.

She reached into Olivia's box. "Only this. My! How white and tired you look, Olivia! Been over to Dacre's?"

"No," Olivia answered, almost sharply. "Mamma has." Then looking at her letter, "Oh, Prunella! I've got it. It 's my appointment. I am surprised. Do see!"

Prunella came out and looked over Olivia's shoulder.

"I did n't think you would either," she said.

But there seemed to have been little question about the matter in the minds of the Honorable Gentlemen of the School Board, for, according to the letter, written in a most individual and quite unclerklike hand, she had been unanimously chosen at the first and only meeting since she had made application.

"He wrote it," Prunella said.

"Who?" Olivia asked, quite unnecessarily, considering she had the letter still open in her hand.

"Why, that Pat Joyce."

"He writes it 'Patrick,'" Olivia said, a little coldly. "I suppose I must acknowledge it."

Prunella had no sense of humor, but just here she laughed.

"To Mike," she said.

CHAPTER VII

TAPS

The sun was kind that day as the procession came out of the shade of the Welling elms into the road across the onion fields. All morning the heat had been breathless, except for a hot breeze, which swayed the worn lace curtains at the parlor windows, between which the Major lay. In full uniform, with the flag of his company for a coverlet, and his sword ready at hand, he slept as if after a victory, his face grown smooth and almost young again in his repose. Over the mantel, the portrait of his young wife, dead in their long ago youth, smiled down at him. From a little basket of flowers in her hand, she was just taking a pink rose. To Bride Joyce, going in and out with flowers, it seemed that she meant the rose for him, and she put one into his hand and smiled back at the portrait lady.

"Y'll be giving him a prettier one in heaven, finding him that young and handsome again," she said softly.

But the sun of the morning and noon went

in as the hearse and the half-dozen carriages wound along the grass-grown drive and then out into the dusty field road. The weeders saw them coming, and stood up and bared their heads, and watched them file black through the gray greenness of the onions, off towards the higher tuft of cedars in the far north field.

Dacre, in the carriage with Mrs. Ladd and Olivia, sat with his head in his hands. His hat, with the new weed on it, was on the seat beside him. Now and then his heavy eyes met Olivia's and flushed her cheeks and made her heart beat.

"You look to-day just as you used to look long ago, when you and Olivia played house in the orchard," Mrs. Ladd said, half tenderly.

He ran his hand through the wave of tawny hair over his brow. "I wish things would n't change so — so hideously," he said bitterly. "Poor old Grandfather!"

"I wish you were both children again, you and Olivia," Mrs. Ladd went on.

"I don't," he said, looking at Olivia.

"Things might be so different, so much better, if we had the — the chance again." Mrs. Ladd sighed.

"I only want them less hideous and — and

vulgar," he exclaimed. "Poor old Grandfather! He was too much of a soldier to be a good manager. He had plenty of fine chances to sell the place. He might have lived twenty years longer if he'd let it go."

Olivia remembered the white old face staring at the empty fireplace and heard the shrill old voice, and looked away, out of the window. The procession was making a turn, the first carriage crossing the bridge over Larch Brook. Larch Brook made almost an island of the little knoll where slept generations of Wellings, under a coverlet of periwinkle, shaded by dark, pointed cedars. She could see the first carriage over the bridge, then the hearse with the flag-draped coffin, then the next carriage with the veterans and the minister, then the next with the bearers, and on the door a man's brown hand holding a Panama hat. It was Patrick Joyce's hand, probably, for he was one of the bearers.

"And now you will let the old place go?" her mother was going on to Dacre.

"It's gone!" he said sharply, "as far as I'm concerned. I saw Chesson yesterday and he says it's mortgaged almost up to its value — a trifle of a thousand left over. I knew there was a mortgage, of course, but I never dreamed

the amount. Grandfather was close-mouthed. Thought I had n't sense enough to understand, I suppose."

"Who holds the mortgage?" Mrs. Ladd asked in a colorless tone.

Dacre's tone was not colorless. "Joyce. Who do you suppose! He holds the valley, I believe, and lets it out to the Poles. But I 'm glad he 's the man — if there has to be a change. He 's a good enough sort, and that nephew and niece of his — they 're all right! They 've done just about everything since Grandfather died. I could n't. To-day there would n't have been a bit of singing if they had n't hustled around and got up something. The girl 's like a Greuze and full of temperament."

Olivia winced at the irrelevancy. It was like Dacre.

Mrs. Ladd had sunk back in her corner. They were rumbling over the bridge. Dacre drew a long breath and looked at Olivia.

"I 'm through with the whole miserable business. I 'm going to work," he said. "I 'm off to-morrow, and sail Saturday. It 's a close shave, but I 've been bound to go with La Rose himself. It 's my tide, is n't it, Olivia? Joyce has advanced me the thousand. Pretty decent of him."

"You are right to go, Dacre," Mrs. Ladd said, "but I wish it did not have to be so soon."

"It's now or never!" he answered shortly.

They had left the onion rows and were climbing the grassy road around the little knoll. In the gray stillness, there were just the soft thud of the horses' hoofs and the swift rush of the brook. Then there was the stop at the little gate, the click of opening doors, and the sound of hushed voices.

Olivia followed close after her mother and Dacre over the matted periwinkle to the new grave under the tall cedar by the wall. Long sprays of neglected rosebushes, catching her skirts, showered pink and white and crimson petals. Just ahead marched the veterans, tremulous, with old shoulders feebly squared; ahead of them went the coffin, flag-draped, between young, stalwart bearers.

When they rested the Major on the periwinkle, and the minister began to read, — "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you — " Olivia drew back, away from where Dacre's quick hand-clasp had drawn her, and leaned in the angle of the wall, under the tremulous boughs

of a white birch. The weight of her secret had pressed heavy during the ride. And now her mother's pale, set face was more than she could endure, and Dacre's bitter lack of sorrow made her own heart ache with a strange complexity of pain. The poor old Major! The last of them all, except Dacre, to be put under the periwinkle out there in the fields of his fathers, that were no longer his! And it was her father that had dispossessed him! And he had not had the courage to face what he had done; he had left it to her to atone. Did her mother know? And if she did know, did she dream that she, Olivia, knew? And knowing, did she still tell her to marry out of the valley, new blood, success, money?

It was very still, just the wind in the cedars and the brook's voice. All around stretched the fields, with the dark green of the Major's elms and pines off there to the left. Behind the wall on which she leaned the hills climbed to the overcast sky.

In the little group of singers stood Patrick and Bride Joyce. He flushed slowly as he glanced over at the wall and then away, turning the leaves of the songbook and bending to whisper to his sister. He seemed almost defi-

antly, arrogantly tall and straight and firm and clear-cut, this dark-haired young Irishman against the wide, sad background of fields — fields that his uncle was getting away from those whose forefathers had held them since Indian days. Very much an invader he seemed there in the little cemetery, waiting to sing the old Major into his last repose.

And then presently they were singing, and his barytone was just as firm and clear and assured as he himself, as he followed on: —

"Sleep, comrade, sleep, in calm repose."

She looked bitterly away from him to Dacre, leaning with bowed head on the tall gray cross that marked his mother's grave. He and she were the last of it all, of the old order. That in itself meant that Fate intended them for each other and for no one else. And through them, Fate, or God, or whatever it was, expected a resurrection, required it of them, a new and splendid order out of the old.

"Sad, ain't it!" Mrs. Clabby whispered at her side, wiping the tears off her rusty veil. "That's Mrs. Welling's grave, right 'longside of him. Awful proud-sperrited woman! And now all these onion fields and these outlandish

foreigners creeping up on her. Don't seem natural for her to stay quiet an' let 'em come."

"Shall reign till life doth cease,"

rang out the voices, clearest the barytone and the fine silver of the soprano.

"An' Mrs. Archibald was just sayin' how Dacre's all alone," Mrs. Clabby whispered on behind her black cotton glove; "not a soul related to him except that high-flyin' Mrs. Chappell that lives 'way out in San Francisco an' has the mortgage on the silver an' the mahogany. Poor boy! An' no more business sense than a — a hoptoad!"

The prayer stopped her.

"Our Heavenly Father, unchanged and unchanging!"

Dacre's eyes met Olivia's across the gravestones. Then she bowed her head and saw the little ferns in the crannies of the wall, the lichens on the stones, a tiny feather caught in a cobweb. But all the time she was poignantly aware of the two men; of Dacre, the last of his race, alone and through her father's fault dispossessed; and of the invader there among them, firm and assured, with his ringing voice.

"O God! O God!" her heart throbbed. "Let

a miracle be! Let me so love him that I can make a king of him! Help me to atone to him, and make him strong to achieve, and help us both to drive out those who have taken what so long has been ours!"

The other prayer ended. A meadowlark sang high and sweet in the cool gray air. Miss Hollins stood patting Dacre's shoulder. They were lowering the flag-draped coffin and singing, "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

Olivia left the wall angle and went over and stood by her mother, on Dacre's other side. After all, why not! For a lifetime they had been playmates. And their parents before them had grown up together. Her mother's hand was cold when she clasped it.

Mrs. Clabby sobbed aloud.

When it was quite over, she found herself walking at Dacre's side over the periwinkle.

"Over there in the corner, the other side of Mother, is where they'll put me," he said in an undertone.

She lifted large eyes full of unshed tears. "And I?" she whispered.

"Oh, there's plenty of room between me and the white rosebush," he whispered back lightly. "Jove! But that girl's voice is sweet.

There 's a sort of heartbreak in it, is n't there?"

"There 's a good deal of heartbreak in everything, it seems to me," Olivia answered with sudden sharpness.

"Oh, that 's what 's the matter with me," he said irritably. "I 've had too much of that sort of thing. I need a lot of joy to set me going. And to-morrow" — his voice dropped into the tenderness that made her cheeks flame — "to-morrow early, I 'll come over for good-bye. My train goes at eleven. To-night there 's packing, lots to burn up and tear up. You 'll be good to me — for good-bye?"

"Oh, yes! I 'll be very good. And you 'll not let Mamma dream of — of it?"

"Not dream of it, dearest," he whispered as he held open the carriage door for her.

But going home, she wondered if she were not dreaming, as she watched, for him, the receding of the little green knoll into the quiet and loneliness of the evening, and heard his hopeful talk with her mother, of Paris, of La Rose's studio, of how hard he was going to work, of what he had read and heard tell of the inspiration of life in the Quartier Latin.

"In a year, or two at the most, you and

Olivia will be coming over to see me hanging 'on the line,'" he said almost gayly, as he left them at their gate, and then was driven off to the old house across the fields.

But the next morning there was not much of a dream about the heartache when, from the kitchen doorstep where she sat shelling peas, she heard him come whistling through the gate and up the path, with Ben, the setter, just as for years he had come to get her to go canoeing or tramping or fishing. Ben found her first, in sudden pursuit of a stray chicken, which brought him flying around the house. Then there were Dacre's call, "Olivia!" and her mother's answer from upstairs, "She 's in the kitchen," and then he was on the step at her side and the peas were rolling over the sun-flecked flagstones.

"I 'll pick them up, darling," he cried softly. "Who cares! Only ten minutes and enough love to last for a year!" And he drew her head down on his shoulder and kissed and kissed.

"*Ssh!* Quick! Mamma will come," she pleaded, drawing back.

He sprang up and drew her to her feet. He was very splendidly handsome in his new gray suit with his black-banded Panama and his

black tie, and the black band on his left arm, and the bright color in his boyish face. And he was quite imperious and determined as he put an arm around her and drew her close and tilted her chin, and looked down into her clear eyes.

"You 're sure — sure — sure, dearest?" he said. "You 're so clever and beautiful, there 'll be dozens of fellows after you. You won't change — sure?"

"Never! I 've promised," she whispered tremulously. "There can never be any one but you. And you 'll work, really, dear? And you 'll be — be good? Paris is so big and so wicked. And the Paris women are so — "

He laughed and kissed the words hotly off her lips.

"So unlike you!" he finished grandly, and then went to meet Mrs. Ladd in the hall, and let Olivia pick up the peas and cool her cheeks and make her eyes less shining.

And presently, he had gayly explained that if they were willing, Ben was to be their dog until his master sent for him, and then there were more gay good-byes, with much laughing about the gay Parisiennes, and then the gate under the honeysuckles had slammed after him.

Ben was crying piteously in the long parlor,

where Dacre had shut him up. Olivia dusted off the hall table carefully with the handkerchief she had been waving.

"The dust is fearful. I wish it would rain," she said.

"But not storm," Mrs. Ladd protested, beginning reluctantly to climb the stairs. "I do hope he 'll have a good passage. But it does seem all wrong that he went so soon after the funeral. It is n't respectful — or practical. He 's left everything in that Joyce's hands, and accepted some sort of — of accommodation from him. But then that 's a Welling all over again! Do you need any help with the peas, Olivia?"

"They 're shelled, Mamma. All done!" Olivia said.

CHAPTER VIII

HO! FOR THE FERRY!

PRUNELLA would never have permitted Robbie to go to the circus when an egg famine threatened Miss Hollins's pantry, and the hot weather made so likely an increase of boarders from the city. But her aunt had been deaf to her arguments, and had not only given Robbie a dime for peanuts, but had wrapped half a fifteen-cent sponge cake in a paper napkin and tucked it into his jacket pocket. It was this last foolish indulgence that still rankled in Prunella's bosom as she walked quickly through the onion fields towards the Welling place to see whether Mrs. Wieniaski had any eggs to sell.

"I 'll go," Prunella had said, not amiably. "I suppose it 's a vital necessity for Robbie to see those idiotic clowns. It will blight his young life if he does n't."

"Not at all, Prunella, but I promised," Miss Hollins had answered, making mayonnaise with the only two eggs in the house. "I promised the boy last winter, when I had that big order for the D. A. R. reception in Wellfield, and he

had to make six trips to the station with cake in one day. He was nice about it when he really wanted to go skating, and I promised. I 'm sorry, Prunella. Perhaps that little Leon Cilkow across the street will go."

"No, I 'll go," Prunella insisted. "Don't let 's get mixed up with any more foreigners, for goodness' sake!" And she took off her big post-office apron and jabbed her hatpin viciously through her last summer's straw hat trimmed with the poppies of two summers before, and went out and slammed the gate behind her.

"The walk will do her more good any day than hoeing beans," Miss Hollins said to herself, comfortably dropping oil. "And then, besides, she 'll find out just what those Polanders are doing with the Welling place, and whether Millicent Chappell has taken away all her uncle's silver and mahogany. There 's that inlaid worktable that I should like to get myself. My mother gave it to Mrs. Welling for a wedding present."

Meanwhile, Prunella was going rapidly along the wide village street. In her then present mood, it annoyed her exceedingly that Michael Joyce's big touring-car stood in front of the town hall and that Patrick Joyce was tinkering

quite familiarly with one of the tires. He had thrown off his coat and hat and worked in a light-blue madras shirt that became well his clear dark skin. Prunella, of course, had no eye for the color scheme, and bowed coldly when he looked up and smiled and asked if he might n't take her on her errand in the car.

"It 's just wasting its time standing here idle, and me mending it when there 's not a bit of it broken," he said. "It would be a great kindness if you would let me take you, and you in a hurry."

But she only shook her head and smiled scarcely at all, and noticed how black and oily his hands were. As she passed the Ladds', she saw Olivia weeding the lettuce and parsley in the garden. She could tell that Olivia had just washed her hair; it made a fluffy, sunny pile on the top of her head as she bent over the green.

However, across the fields the walk was hot and undiverted, and it was not until she came into the marshy grounds below the orchard that adventure began.

"Just as I might have expected!" she exclaimed to herself. "High water after the storm yesterday and the day before! Now, what 'll I

do! And after all this walk, too. Robbie ought never to have gone to the circus. But that is exactly like Aunt Lou!"

Before she had time longer to lament her plight, a wholly charming and novel possibility presented itself. Out of the weeds and fern that ran riot in the little valley and that now made a picturesque border for the highwater creek, there protruded, quite close to the tuft of sedge on which she stood, the end of a small raft. Instantly there came visions of the old days when she and Olivia and Dacre had paddled on just such floating palaces, en route for the foreign shores pictured in Clark's Geography. And it was quite Prunella-like for her to forget her injuries and afflictions and set herself delightfully afloat upon it over the muddy current. Such fun was it that she poled herself first a little upstream and then a little downstream, and finally landed herself almost reluctantly on the orchard side and pushed the raft into a safe mooring among the fern. Surely Robbie at the circus was no better diverted with the idiotic clowns! Then, to make up for lost minutes, she ran through the orchard and the garden, and up to the elm-shaded yard.

Doors and windows of the old house stood

wide open. Bits of excelsior and tissue paper and rags, and leaves of old music, littered the much-trodden grass. A seatless chair stood under the pear tree. Prunella slowed down suddenly. Among the rags was a scrap of delicately flowered blue satine. The sight of it there in the débris of the broken-up old home gave her a strange sensation. She remembered it well. The only time she had ever seen Dacre's mother, she had worn that flowered satine. The picture came back quite vividly from her very little girlhood — such a pretty, pretty lady with crinkly golden hair, coming into church, leading Dacre in white kilts, with curls like his mother's. The next time she had seen Dacre's mother come into church, she had been borne in her coffin, on her way to the little periwinkle knoll in the far north field, and Dacre, a big boy of ten, with his curls gone, had come in hand in hand with his grandfather.

"Silly of me!" Prunella muttered, dashing her hand over her eyes. "I never cry. What 's the matter with me?"

Then her glance fell upon scraps of old letters, an old photograph of the Major as first lieutenant, a baby picture, perhaps, of Dacre, a faded spray of artificial roses.

"Brutal of him to go and leave strangers to do it all, touch all the family things, but just like him!" she was thinking. "Light and selfish if a man ever was! Oh, if Olivia should be such a fool!"

"Oh, it iss you, Missis Loomis," called a guttural voice from the kitchen door. "You come when all much mixed up. Yust thiz day have gone ze things to ze lady ant not yet I bring my things."

"I have come for eggs, Mrs. Wieniaski," Prunella answered coldly. "Have you any to sell?" The barefooted, disheveled woman in the familiar doorway gave her a distinct shock, foolish as she thought it ever to be shocked.

"I no look to-day yet, so much to do, and my hens no lay well," Mrs. Wieniaski responded blandly. "I see quick when I put on my shoes. I get stuck in ze garden by ze weeds. You come in an I go see."

She was putting on the great shoes she had taken from under the stove. Prunella stepped gingerly into the littered kitchen, and went on through the great pantry, into the long dining-room, where the lines left by the pictures showed pale on the wall-paper, the big fireplace was filled with torn letters, and the shadows of

the wistaria leaves flickered on the dusty floor. Where had stood the old mahogany sideboard there was a washtub full of soaking clothes.

"Beasts!" Prunella was saying to herself. "If Dacre had had any spirit he would have dug ditches or sold peanuts rather than have things this way. And gone to be an artist with a Polish washtub in his great-great-grandfather's dining-room!"

Wistaria and woodbine shadows were the only unchanged things in the long parlors, she was anticipating, as she stepped across the familiar threshold. Suddenly, she stopped, amazed. At the windows hung the old lace curtains, and there stood the old square piano, just as it always had stood, between the doors; it was open and on the rack was a thick, light-green folio marked "Dvorak, Edition Schirmer." So new was the folio that it was not yet flattened out on the stand. Prunella drew nearer to look. Things were connecting themselves in her mind. Only the day before, that Stefan Posadowski had got just such a bulky parcel by post from New York. Impudent thing! It was all quite clear now. He had bought the Welling piano, the piano that had been Dacre's

mother's and grandmother's! And Dacre was gone without a pang at the desecration.

"Yust twelf ekks I fint," said Mrs. Wieniaski at her elbow. She had again removed her shoes and so had come noiselessly into the room. "You look our Stefan's piano. He play much music. He no lak to work. He not my son. He my husband's sister son. His mowther gret singer lady. She die. Stefan lak much thiz plaze, but he no work to pay. He play ant play all time. He no goot to mek money. He not lak us. He too fine. He say kip old plaze all nize." She shrugged her fat shoulders and laughed, showing her gold-filled teeth. "Me ant my man, we work all day ant we no time to kip things nize."

Prunella held out her hand. "The eggs," she said coldly. "How much are they? It will be too bad if you do not keep things — clean."

"Thirty-fife cents, please. Oh, always I kip things clean. Ant we will hafe many boarders ant I will hafe them to be clean. You will see. Stefan he clean. Always he wash himself much. Too much, my man say. All ofer efery day — that too much. Soap it costs too much."

Out in the yard, Prunella stopped and picked up the scrap of delicately flowered blue satine.

"I'll take it home to Aunt Lou. Perhaps she will remember the very dress. It will interest her anyhow," she said to herself, going down through garden and orchard with a queer load on her heart. "Oh, that brute! To go and leave things this way! Oh, if Olivia should marry him! I've a great mind to tell her just what I think. He was always selfish as a boy. And if she just knew!"

Then her thought sped ahead of her to the repetition of the raft adventure and she quickened her steps into a little run down the hill, with due care of her eggs. But this time no such solitary enterprise was possible. Instead, there faced her what seemed a most odious necessity.

The raft lay safely moored on the other side of the water and Mr. Stefan Posadowski, after so mooring her, was just climbing the opposite bank. Desperate as the moment was, Prunella remembered that he was "too clean" when she observed his snowy outing shirt.

He was instantly aware of her glance, and turning, lifted his soft gray hat from the somewhat Paderewski-like lock of hair that fell over his brow.

"Oh, you will gif me pardon, please!" he

cried, running down the bank. "I haf not known you come."

Her instantaneous fear that he would smile and be perhaps familiar had quite vanished. He was serious and aloof almost to melancholy. His dark eyes, under their heavy, level brows, were tragic rather than humorous.

"At once I come and bring you across," he went on, poling out the raft. "For two it iss quite safe. I myself haf made it."

"Oh, thank you!" Prunella said stiffly, holding her eggs and thinking about the washtub in the dining-room.

The raft touched the shore, and with all the stately formality of a polonaise dancer in his native land, Stefan handed Prunella and her eggs aboard. There was a fine dull color in his olive cheeks.

"Your frient's old home, iss it not to you most sad?" he asked quietly as he pushed off. But he did not look at her.

"It is — most — sad," she answered. She wanted to say "most dirty," but the sight of his long, shapely brown hands on the pole would n't let her.

"To me it iss so. All ze time I feel ze — ze uzzer lifes in ze rooms. I cannot forget. I

not much like zis land, where to get rich iss all, and all iss work, work, and change what iss old."

Prunella melted a little. "I should n't think you would," she said. "Why don't you go back to your own land?"

He lifted his melancholy eyes for a moment to hers. "You think so? My uncle he say gret chance here. To me, music it is my chance — not onions." The ghost of a smile crossed his lips. "You like music?"

"Dear me! I don't know 'Yankee Doodle' from the 'Doxology,' without the words," Prunella said briskly as they touched shore. "Now I must hurry." And she sprang off lightly without waiting for his help.

"Zat music I do not know," he said reflectively.

He stood holding his hat in his hand, and it struck Prunella as she looked at him that even his awkwardness was courtly. And yet his manner bored her. It was too impressive. What right had he to be courtly?

"Oh, thank you very much!" she added.

"It iss I zat sank you," he said carefully, and then began to find mooring the small raft quite a slow and elaborate process, that she

might have ample time to get up the bank and well on her way before he followed.

"Thank Heaven, he knew his place and did n't insist on walking with me all through the fields," she said afterwards, relating her adventures to Miss Hollins. "And somehow you can't help feeling sorry for him. He's really decent. I told him to go back to his own country. I did, Aunt Lou. He is n't like the other Polanders, and I should think he 'd perish, living as they live. And think of his having Madam Welling's old piano — and actually playing on it, Aunt Lou ! Is n't Dacre a brute?"

Miss Hollins snipped the threads off the finely finished darn in the tablecloth.

"I guess Madam Welling won't mind," she said, with a little smile. "I 'll walk over some Sunday and get him to play to me."

"Aunt Lou! What perfect nonsense! And Mrs. Clabby would fall in a fit from horror."

CHAPTER IX

CROP ROTATION

Olivia sat at her father's tall mahogany desk with the glass doors. It had seemed altogether natural for her to appropriate his study back of the sitting-room, with the door opening on the gravel path that led to the garden and the barns. Just now the path was narrowed with the profusion of the Sweet Williams and the lemon lilies and the Scotch roses. The desk stood in the angle between the west window and the door so that in the old times her father could look up from his reading or writing and see his orchards and meadows, and, even, in the leafless winter days, follow with his eyes the little path that led from the meadows to the high pasture, and catch the silver shine of the birches along the trout brook.

Olivia, however, was intent upon the pamphlet spread open before her on the desk. It was the circular announcing the summer courses at the Massachusetts Agricultural College, and she was poring over the section marked, "Course IV, Section H. Soils and Tillage." There was

the frown of intense preoccupation between her level brows, and very much the air of a business woman about her as she sat in her white shirtwaist with the neck turned in for coolness and the sleeves rolled high as if she were not afraid of work. Presently, she let the frown go and reached into a carved pigeonhole for a trolley timetable. In the pigeonhole next lay an envelope bearing the blue and white pennant of a transatlantic steamship. For a moment, she abandoned the trolley table and colored faintly as she looked at the gay envelope, then tucked it into her blouse.

"Shan't I knead your bread for you, dear?" Mrs. Ladd asked suddenly at the door. "You are trying to do too many things. You 'll be worn out, and then what 'll I do!" She stood against the garden background with her hands full of freshly cut lettuce.

Olivia sprang up. "Oh, no, Mamma! Bread's tremendously interesting. And this time I 've just got to succeed. After all, it 's no more than laboratory work in college. And, Mamma, I 've looked it all up about the summer courses in agriculture. I 'm going. It will be no end of fun."

They had gone into the big cool kitchen

and Mrs. Ladd was washing the lettuce at the sink.

"It 's a wild scheme, Olivia," she said abruptly. "Take your vacation in peace. It 's too late to save the place. I 've been thinking at it for years. Even record-breaking crops would n't do it. And, besides, the mortgage is due next June. With your school work and —"

Olivia kneaded vigorously. "Ah, but Mamma! Let me try. Think of the adventure of it! And if I should succeed! If I should, Mamma! It kills me to think of those lemon lilies — next June."

"Don't think of them! Think of your future — how free you are to make it what you please. Think of getting quite away from all the family tradition of failure. Fix your mind on new things, Olivia."

Olivia lightly touched the bubbles on the plump roll of dough. "Yes, Mamma, — after I quite fail with the old. Let me try. Don't discourage me. I might succeed and make a — a break in the tradition. Then you would n't — would n't mind if I did n't desert the old, would you, Mamma?"

"I should n't ever mind anything, Olivia, that made your life utterly different from mine,"

she answered slowly, going to put the lettuce on the ice.

As to how she was to succeed, Olivia was by no means certain as she set off that afternoon for a tour of farm inspection, with Ben, Dacre's setter, trotting at her heels. And yet she was very certain that she should succeed. Ever since the night of her mother's revelations, she had been quite determined to save the place. It had never occurred to her to question the possibility. And after Major Welling had told her the other truth, it came to her just as simply and just as inevitably that she had another debt to pay. To be sure, since the orchard scene, that debt had not seemed to her a matter of dollars and cents. She was going to liquidate that indebtedness with herself. And yet dollars and cents might become a very vital part of even that delicate obligation; if Dacre needed money to go on with his studies, where was he going to get it if not from her? She must be ready for any emergency in helping him to make a man of himself.

All this phase of the matter she had reasoned out without any uncertainty or any difficulty. As for practical details, she knew that the district school would pay her six hundred dollars. That would keep her and her mother through

the winter — if she did n't buy any new clothes. The next thing — and the puzzling thing — was to make the place begin to pay. She had heard of winter wheat and fall cabbage and late spinach. Why should n't their rich old fields produce winter wheat and fall cabbage and late spinach? After the years and years that they had been under cultivation, surely they must be in fine condition to produce. And then she indulged herself with a wild and lovely vision of the old place a year from then, of every field's being green with the promise of a record-breaking crop, and then of her going to Michael Joyce, and saying haughtily to him, "See, sir! See what I am doing with the place. You want to squeeze all the money you can out of the valley. Wait a year and I 'll pay you double the mortgage!" She could see herself perfectly, standing in his office just as she had stood three weeks before, only with much more hauteur. Why should n't it all be possible? The brutish Poles and the ignorant Irish were doing it. Why should n't she, with all her college training? And now was the very chance to learn what she did n't yet know, in the summer school of agriculture. She was already quite well informed from her reading in the village library,

and felt perfectly intelligent upon the subject of crop rotation, commercial fertilizers, legumes, and disk harrows.

It was with the idea of studying crop rotation that she sallied forth that afternoon, with the willing Ben as protector. She carried a small notebook and pencil and she was going to study out each field, its soil and exposure, and then decide what crop would make the best beginning in the cycle. After all, college training was a help in every kind of occupation.

It was very still and very hot. The garden was drooping and the fields shimmered. She had left her mother trying to keep cool on the sofa in the dark parlor, with a palmleaf fan over her face. She had drawn down Olivia's face and given her a long kiss when she came in to announce that she and Ben were going to find a cool place by the brook in the high pasture. And Olivia was trying to drive away the little pang left by that kiss with a very scientific contemplation of the soil, as she climbed the path and Ben ran up and down and in and out after a rabbit.

Presently something besides soil arrested her glance in the path ahead of her. It was a small piece of white paper pierced in each corner with

a small round hole, which instantly proclaimed it as belonging to somebody's Harvard folder. Olivia picked it up and beheld upon it, written in a fine, scholarly hand, these words: "One of the most serious problems on American irrigated lands is that of organic matter supply. As long as these lands remain relatively cheap and the farm units are not too small, a rotation of crops can be used." This interesting statement was followed by an elaborate series of mathematical formulæ calculating the amount of organic matter needed in such and such acreage under such and such conditions.

She read it and then re-read it. It was pleasant to realize that she could understand it, that is, almost all of it. The expression "farm units" was somewhat misleading. Probably some young farmer bent on just such an errand as herself had dropped the paper. She put it between the pages of her own little notebook and climbed the fence into the high pasture.

She had been right. There was a little breeze in the high pasture. She felt it as soon as she landed among the mulleins and fern on the other side of the fence. But, strange to say, the breeze was announcing itself by a little sport with another small leaf of folded paper,

blowing it in and out of the fern and whisking it quite over the tops of the mulleins. Olivia, hot in pursuit, finally caught it, and read, in the same scholarly writing, these words: "The keeping of hogs and cattle not only materially reduces household expenses, but provides an unfailing supply of organic matter for the enrichment of impoverished soil." Then followed more intricate formulæ and more carefully worked-out problems.

The idea was new to her, and yet how perfectly obvious. She seated herself on a boulder in a tuft of birches and re-read the lines. Ben, with lolling tongue, came up and stretched himself at her side, looking up with inquiring eyes.

"Why, of course, old fellow!" she said, patting his head. "And you can drive up the cows, like the shepherd dogs in Scotland."

Prosaic as was her thought, she made a romantic picture sitting on her boulder among the glinting white birches. She wore the very same white gown in which she had kneaded her bread, and the leaf shadows dappled her bare neck and bare arms.

"Of course, I could n't tell how many cows and pigs until I know just how many fields I 'll cultivate," she was calculating.

To Mr. Patrick Joyce, coming across the pasture looking for the missing leaves of his notebook, she was so pleasant to behold that he was quite content to let the wind have them while he stood behind a cedar watching her, and effacing himself that he might not startle her. But just as he amazedly beheld her pondering the very leaves for which he was searching, Ben started up on a sudden rabbit memory, and dashed around the very tree that hid him.

At Ben's sharp, surprised bark, not at all a rabbit bark, she looked up and paled a little.

"Ben!" she called. "What is it? Not a snake?"

Joyce stepped somewhat guiltily out into the path. Her look of fear changed to one of annoyance.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "it's you!"

"Yes," he admitted, with a shamefacedness that displeased him in himself. Why should n't it be he, pray? "Yes, it is I. And you will forgive my startling you. Sure, it's not the bit of an idea I had you were here." Now he was coloring furiously, and his brogue you could cut with a knife.

"And I," she said, with a faint smile, — "I

had not the smallest idea you were here. I came up here to study — to study crop rotation."

"My word!" he cried. "It is that I was doing. And when I went studying as I was walking, out of me folder dropped two leaves. It was for those I was looking, coming back here startling y'." He had drawn nearer and stood bareheaded in the hot sunshine. He was warm after his climb up the hill, and carried his coat over his arm and had upon his brow beads of honest perspiration. But the fact that he stood with his head bared in this knightly fashion made him suddenly an interesting figure.

"Are these perhaps they, your lost notes?" she said, with an unmistakable smile. "I read them. Do you mind?"

"And why should I mind, indeed! It is very glad I am that you would read them." He was sure that never before had his brogue been so annoying.

"Oh, thank you! They were very — very suggestive, and I got an idea from them." She held them out and he came to take them. Ben had thrown himself in the path between, breathing hard after his fruitless run.

"It's happy I am that y' found anything in-

teresting there. Was it perhaps the idea of irrigating this pasture from the throut brook and planting it out in fall cabbages?"

If she had been more of a farmer or even just a closer observer, she would have known that he was laughing at her. And it would have been quite easy to see the twinkle in his blue eyes and the little twitch at the corner of his very good-looking mouth. A man resorts to very desperate measures when a woman has kept him ill at ease for ten minutes.

"Horrors! Never!" she cried seriously. "This beloved pasture! No. It was about keeping hogs and cattle that you gave me the idea. Won't you sit down? Have you ever tried it?"

This time he laughed aloud and she did, too. "Oh, yes," he said. "The sitting down I have tried many times in the university."

She grew more formal. "Of course I meant about the hogs and the cattle, but it did sound funny, didn't it? Have you ever tried keeping them?"

He had thrown himself upon the grass in the long shadow of a little cedar. Engrossed as she was in her idea, she was vaguely aware of his muscular length and of the fine whiteness of his teeth as he laughed.

"Oh, no! Never have I been a bit of a farmer," he said. "It is to make me a farmer that my uncle has been bringing me over, the way I must give up the studying to be a barrister." He had grown suddenly very serious, and there was a little frown between his brows. "And it is why I am studying crop rotation, that I may learn all about farming in your country." He seemed to have quite forgotten her in the thought of the changes of his own life. The thought was evidently not a wholly cheerful one.

Olivia gave him a quick glance. "And you do not quite like it over here?" she asked with a little sense of *noblesse oblige*.

He was looking away from her at a yellow butterfly on a mullein, and biting the end of a grass blade.

"It is what I do not yet know," he answered thoughtfully, "whether I will stay or not. You see, always I have been used to the sea. My father was one of the inspectors of fisheries in Galway, the way that always I have had my own boat except when I was in Dublin at the university. It is that I keep missing since I am come here, the sea and the cliffs and the fishermen at my home in Leenane. It is quite

different to be here in this valley with all that is strange, instead of at home with the old friends of my father."

She had quite forgotten him in the wide, romantic picture his half-melancholy words were drawing for her. "And your father — " she began.

"It is three years since my father was drowned in the winter gales of Killery," he said. "There is no one left of us in the old house in Leenane. It is why my uncle has been sending for my sister and me, that the three of us might be together and not with the sea between us."

"At any rate, it is fine that you three can be together," Olivia said with sudden gentleness. "It is much easier not to have some one we love on the other side of the water." And she drew a quick little breath.

"Indeed it is then. But there are those that I love in the old country and that keep the half of me there." He sprang up as he spoke. "But you will excuse me. Always I do be forgetting myself when there is a chance of talking of my home. It is the way a man has in a strange land." Suddenly, a smile broke the melancholy of his face. "And it 's very glad I am that you will not be thinking of planting out this pasture."

"Oh, no!" she said. "I cannot tell you how dear to me this pasture is. No, I am on my way to those fields over there."

"Those fields? And it is a great pity that it is so long since they have been growing anything, the way that they have so many weeds. I thank you for finding my pages for me." And he was turning down the hill.

"Wait a minute!" she cried, flushing hot. "You were very kind about the school. I thank you very much. And I — I was very rude. I told Mamma, and she at once said that I was very rude. It was unpardonable."

"Oh, not at all," he answered with a little laugh. "It is quite as you saw it. And why should you not say what you think! If some of my people have learned from your people what is graft and what you call wirepulling, sure it is right that you should say it is wrong. But you will not believe that it is the way of us all. At home in the old country never have we learned the way. And I am glad that you have said what you did, though at first there was the least bit of a hurt."

Her impulse had been to hold out her hand. The little interlude of talk of home had strangely shifted away from him her antagonism for what

he stood for. But as he answered her tentative apology, she wavered between the old hate and the new tolerance.

"At any rate," she said, a little coolly, "I do thank you for your promptness, you and your uncle. Good-afternoon!" And she sat for a minute pulling a birch leaf to pieces and wishing she had been a little less friendly. Somehow, he was good fun, and the little nonsense at the beginning had been pleasant and had made her forget — forget that he had been probably prospecting on the lands that were so heavily mortgaged to his uncle. No doubt he had been doing that very thing, planning how he would manage the farm when the mortgage was foreclosed the next spring. Perhaps his uncle was going to give him the place, for him to work out his knowledge upon it, and so keep him content in the new country where he so much missed the sea. When she finally got up and went on to look at the fields in which the weeds were so rampant, her heart was very bitter against the invaders, and she was vowing that she would wring from the old place a freedom from their yoke.

CHAPTER X

BEES AND ROSES

PRUNELLA threw the brier roses into the waste-basket without a moment's hesitation. The remembrance of the raft episode did not at all incline her heart to mercy. However, the thought of Miss Kirk, the blind boarder who depended upon fragrances to give her the summer's colors, made her draw them out and put them into the stone jar that caught the drippings from the yellow japanned water-cooler. Only the night before, Miss Kirk had felt her way in from the garden and said, ecstatically, "How beautiful the roses are! I 've never known them so fragrant before." And it was wholly what Prunella knew that Miss Kirk would see in the faint sweetness of those brier roses that saved them from the waste-basket. But it was indignation at Stefan's daring a second time, and wonder that Patrick Joyce had another thick, finely addressed letter with a crest on its green wax seal, that made Prunella thoughtlessly put "The Congregationalist" into Father Zujewski's box and "The Catholic

World" into the box of the Reverend Doctor Barnabas Britton.

By a pleasant chance the two clerical gentlemen opened their boxes at one and the same moment: Father Zujewski, big and muscular and middle-aged, in black alpaca coat and shiny black straw hat; Dr. Britton, stooped and thin and white-haired, but rosy, in linen duster and white Panama. Although alphabetically remote, the two boxes clicked open with perfect unanimity. Dr. Britton's sunburned right hand, with its worn gold ring, fumbled inside and came out full of a letter from John tramping through the Scotch Highlands, a picture postcard from Theodosia conducting a party of tourists through Switzerland, Burpee's "Fall Rose Announcement," a circular of Totten's Sanitary Communion Cups — and "The Catholic World." Dr. Britton's brows went up quite above the rims of his round, double-lensed spectacles, and with a twinkle in his eyes he turned towards his reverend neighbor. He, too, had his hands full — letters in thin, foreign-looking envelopes postmarked "Varsovie," a roll of flute music in a Schirmer wrapper, the August number of the "Apiarist," a bundle of leaflets of the "Apostleship of Prayer" and — "The Congre-

gationalist." Father Zujewski's brows contracted in a Slavic frown, then relaxed as his round, sallow face broke into a broad smile.

"Perhaps — perhaps ze little postmistress has had day dreams," he said in his slow, unwieldy English, holding out "The Congregationalist."

"It 's easier to believe that it is God's will than that Prunella has had day dreams," Dr. Britton laughed. "I 've known her ever since she was born. She is too practical to permit herself dreams, even if they came to her. Let us call it God's way of making us know each other better. Keep it and read it."

"Or often, long ago, has not God spoken His will through dreams!" the other exclaimed. "So either way it iss His will. Gladly I keep ant read. And you the same."

"Gladly," Dr. Britton said genially, putting "The Catholic World" into his deep pocket. "How are the bees these days of blossom?"

They had snapped their boxes shut and were going down the post-office steps together, out into the shady street. Prunella, vigorously post-marking letters, *thump, thump,* looked up as the door banged shut.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "Dr. Britton 's hard up, I must say!"

"The day lonk are zey busy, ze little fellows," the priest was answering. "All over for zem iss much sweet. And from your roses zey steal."

"Oh, I see them in the garden, royal chaps in their black and yellow! But you give back all the sweetness they steal, in your flute music."

The other colored like a boy. "You hear me play?" he said. "So far it goes, ze noise I mek?"

"Oh, yes! And I love to hear it. It comes right up from your study to mine, these still, hot days. And sometimes there is a piano with you—a wonderful piano."

"It is ze boy Stefan. A great gift he has of God. But to mek money he has no gift. And he iss not happy."

"A gift like his does not usually bring happiness," Dr. Britton said. "It is too great for happiness, because it has in it all emotion, all experience. I can feel it. But your flute! When I hear that I seem to be in Greece, on some sunny slope, with the sheep."

The priest sighed. "I—I feel myself in my own land, wiz its sorrows. Zat is why I play—not to forget."

They had come to the gate in the high old

evergreen hedge. Within, the white, green-shuttered parsonage looked out rather unsmilingly.

Dr. Britton pushed open the gate. "Come in and have a little smoke," he said. "Your country and your people have fascinated me ever since I was a boy in school and studied history. Come in! I, too, am a celibate since my wife's death five years ago."

"Not now can I come in. Some uzzer time. Stefan — he waits for me. What you read in history, zat iss what I not let myself to forget. So I play — to remember."

"It is a very sadly splendid story, your country's," the other said thoughtfully, leaning on the gate. Warm as the afternoon was, he was in no hurry to shut himself into his cool, green-shaded study, with his palmleaf fan and his glass of iced tea and his sermon on "The Enemy within Our Gates." Somehow, it had quickly occurred to him that the man he was talking to could furnish him with very first-hand material for his discourse. It was at best a delicate and difficult subject, this setting-forth to his dwindled congregation of the menace to the old religious order in the full numbers pouring into the low, brown frame church every Sunday, at

the ringing of the tinny bell in its cross-tipped spire. So, under the play of his genial and half-idle talk, he was on the alert to study and to understand this Polish priest. At any moment, perhaps, in the course of their conversation, there might be said the very thing that would give the key to the mystery in the new order of things. He would have been very glad if his invitation had been accepted and he had been permitted to order another glass of iced tea and set forth cigars on the smoking-table.

"But ze end — how bitter!" the other was exclaiming. "In books, it sound big, ze story of my land. But in life — it iss death!" And he pushed back his shiny black straw hat and mopped his hot face with a bright blue cotton handkerchief.

"It seems to me that the end of your history has not yet come," Dr. Britton went on, his gracious voice grown somewhat musing. "To me, you are making history in this country. Poland has seen but the beginning." He was pleased with his point of view. Until now, in voicing it, he had not known that he had accepted as his point of view so tolerant an outlook. "God's ways are mysterious. No doubt your people are bringing to us what — what we

ourselves are in need of — and just when we need it." He felt that he was making distinct progress in his sermon.

"Perhaps — perhaps it iss what you say," the priest answered slowly, as if he too were following an undercurrent of thought. "But — but how if my people get here from your people what for zem iss not good? To mek big money — to dress fine — it iss what zey learn right away."

Dr. Britton opened the gate a little wider. That was a capital point for his sermon — the force of example. "Why," he said, "that is unfortunately the tendency of the age. It 's a material age, whatever the country or the people. And we — you and I — it 's — it's up to us, as the boys say, to stand against it. You'd better come in and have a smoke."

"Not today, pleace! You hear him play? See already he tired to wait so long. Good-bye! What you say it iss true. Much prayer iss needed." And he turned and went down the walk towards the wild Polish folk-song that rang out from the windows of the little house next the ugly little church.

In going, he met Olivia coming up, with an armful of books, and a bunch of faded clover

and orchard grass and timothy. To him she was a new and unfamiliar figure in the village streets and a not especially gracious or kindly one.

"Oh, Dr. Britton!" she called. "How nice and cool and undusty you look in there!" She stopped and leaned on the gate in the shade and waited for him to come and hold out his hand.

"Well! Dropped from heaven, did you!" he said. "Come in and rest and get some roses. It's hot enough for a storm."

"No, I must n't stop," she answered, pushing her hat back from the moist rings of hair on her brow. "Mamma always waits luncheon for me now that I'm going to school again. I just wanted to sniff your cedar and — and see something that has n't changed," she finished almost bitterly.

"And you think me a rock of permanence!" he laughed. "Why, Olivia, things are whirling so fast around me that sometimes — sometimes I can't tell which is moving, the other people or I."

"I can tell, Dr. Britton. It's not you. You are just the same as you were when I was a little girl and stood on the cushions in the pew so that you could see I had come to church. For goodness' sake, don't even suggest that you are n't just the same."

"I am — quite the same," he said in a lower, graver tone. "You can depend on me, you and your mother, just as you always have done, Olivia. But you are so efficient, so independent, you can stand quite unsupported."

"Can I!" she exclaimed with a little laugh. "For Mamma's sake I 'm making a huge bluff. But then I am going to pay off that mortgage. I'm going to if I die doing it! The place shan't go out of the family — to the Irish."

"You 'll do it! I have n't a doubt of it. And you're getting a lot of practical information up at the Agricultural College? Things you can put to use right away?"

"Oh, yes! To-day we had timothy and clover and orchard grass. See!" And she held up her wilted bunch. "I never dreamed of all the differences. And clover is just the thing for some of our worn-out fields. But even into the Agricultural College, the Irish have intruded. There is n't a corner without them."

He was thinking how safe it was to count upon her success, this vigorous, brilliant, well-prejudiced young woman whom he had seen grow up. She herself was the very finest type of the order that was passing, except, perhaps, in her religious outlook. It would not be so safe

to count upon her orthodoxy as upon her success in running the farm. After all, she too was in the current of change, bitter as were her prejudices.

"Any Irish from here?" he questioned, following her thought. "It's the best place for them to go, ill-prepared as they have been for farming in their miserable country." As he spoke, the flute and the piano sent a plaintive melody up from the little brown rectory.

"That Patrick Joyce is there," she said. "I can hardly endure it — to see him learning how to run — to run our farm — if I fail! But I will not fail!" And she gathered up her books and her faded specimens. "I don't think Mamma believes that I shall not fail," she added. "Do come and see her, Dr. Britton, and make her believe."

He took her hand. "Your mother is too — too tired of hoping to have any faith," he said. "With her, love is all that is left. But wait. You'll give her a new faith when you succeed. Good-bye, if you won't come in for some roses."

"Good-bye! Be sure to come! It's done me good to talk." And she turned to go.

"Oh, wait a minute!" he cried. "Any news

from Dacre? I have n't had a line. Is he all right?"

Her delicate color grew a shade deeper under the heat. "We 've heard several times, strange to say. Dacre hates to write so. He 's in Paris — quite happy — and hard at work."

"Poor boy! I wish he had your courage and industry — and pride."

"Perhaps he has," she said, a little pinker still. "He 's never had a chance before. This is the first thing he has really liked. Good-bye!"

Back in the green-shaded study, the music came in passionate snatches through the hot quiet of the afternoon. Bees hummed in the woodbine around the windows. It was not a good time for sermon-writing, full as his mind was of contrasts, consequences, warnings. Instead, he leaned back in his big leather chair and cut the pages of "The Catholic World." But as he snipped and the music came and went, he was thinking of Dacre and Olivia, the little children he had baptized not so many years before. They were in the very van of the defense against the new order of things. But after all, in the light of their family history, who had let down the gates to the invaders? That was a large and significant point in the situation.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAGIC OF THE MOON

It happened that very night that Mr. Patrick Joyce, of the invading army, found himself most delightfully and unexpectedly in the position of a spy. Made pensive by the thick letter with the green seal and the British stamp, which Prunella had put half grudgingly into his post-office box, he had gone for a stroll in the moonlight. He had sauntered as far as the high pasture, and with the letter in his pocket and his pipe in his mouth, he had sat for an hour or so on the identical boulder on which his haughty enemy, Miss Ladd, had sat at their recent interview. Below him lay the dark mass of the village trees, the white spire of the meeting-house, the light and dark of roof-lines in and out of shadow, and beyond, the silver curve of the river around the old Welling place. It was very lovely, the scene and the sweet air, but there was an ache in his heart for the old country. Her letter had made the ache. They were out much in the boats, Aileen said, and the salmon leaping and the lads busy

with the hauling, and they missing him and Bride. It was Aileen's way to say that the lads were missing him and Bride, but he knew! And after the gales of the day before the shore was all red and shining with the seaweed, and the smell was that sweet! And Brian Desmond was back from the trout-fishing in Glen Inagh, and he was after bringing her a little deer, and she was after tying a ribbon around the sweet creature's neck and naming him Pat! He was a darlin' and him coming to lick her hand and ate cake from her palm. And they were after going to a dance over at Ballynahinch, the twelve of them, and coming home they were caught in a shower — faith, a drenching like the deluge! And she had been missing him at the dance, the way that Rory and Mike and Jim had to keep her dancing to stop the ache at her heart — and so on and so on! And she was trying to stop spaking the brogue, the way that when he came to bring her with him to America he would not be ashamed.

Ashamed of her! What would n't he give to hear her sweet brogue and see the dimples in the cheeks of her! What would n't he give to have her there to show all those proud, cold Yankee people who seemed to think that in

Ireland there were only servants and folk of low birth and no education. Would n't it be a great day for him if he could have Aileen by his side in the automobile and let every one see a real Irish beauty — Aileen with her hair like the gold of the gorse and her eyes as deep and brown as the pools in Bealanabrack! And then the highbred air of her with all the gentleness! He would like to be showing that proud Miss Ladd an Irish gentlewoman.

So he sat in the moonlight, smoking and dreaming, and presently got up and sauntered down through the fields to the village. Ten o'clock had just struck. The houses were all asleep except the Ladd house. There the soft light of the Chinese hall lamp met the moonlight at the open front door, and there was the creak of a rocking-chair on the front stoop. And just as Joyce turned from the field path into the street, a girl's very wideawake voice called from within, —

"I 've finished those fertilizer tables, Mamma. And now I must water the young cabbages before I go to bed. They 're all drying up. No. You sit still. I 'll do it."

Her words reminded him that he had not studied the fertilizer tables, and no doubt he

would have hurried on and turned from dreams to tillage problems, had she not at that moment come to the door and stood against the light in her soft white gown. She was n't unlike Aileen in her slimness and the long lines of her figure. But then Aileen had the litheness and grace of a white birch tree in Glen Erriff. At any rate, he found himself slowing up in his walk, and looking with some interest through the breaks in the ragged hedge, as she came down the steps and went round the corner of the house nearest him. For a moment he lost sight of her, but he heard the rattle of the watering-can, and then, presently, the chug of the pump. Hard though his heart was against her, the gallant Irish soul of him almost sent him flying round to the gate and up to save her from the weight of the water she was having to carry. It was hard work she was doing, pumping and carrying when all the rest of the village were asleep. But she was a plucky one — and a proud one! And then he stood quite still in the shadow and watched for her to come again into his line of vision. When she did reappear, it was only in shadow on the moonlit white wall of the old mansion. She herself was beyond the narrow glimpse afforded him

through the break in the hedge. Faith, it was like peeping at fairies to see the airy double of her swaying and bending and spraying there in the warm, sweet silence of the night. So full was the moon and so faithful the reflection that he could see every smallest curl broken loose from her braids, the soft curves of her figure through the gown she held wrapped close to avoid a wetting, the feathery shadow of the falling water as she curved arm and wrist and held high her watering-pot. So still it was that the swish of the drops on the young cabbages was quite audible, and the contact of can and pump as she came and went seemed to break into a sort of enchantment.

"Sure, it 's a pity that it 's cabbages and not roses and lilies and wallflowers in so lovely a scene!" he whispered to himself.

And then, as he whispered, he heard the soft slam of a back door, and she came no more. The creaking chair on the front stoop had long since been hushed, and in a moment the front door went to and the light out in the old fan above the door frame. Up stairs on the east side, candlelight flared softly in the front chamber; then the curtains were drawn and the garden was left to the moonlight.

"Faith, it 's her shadow I 'm liking better than herself!" he said softly as he relighted his pipe and went on towards home. "And, poor child, she need n't be killing herself with the work. Uncle Mike has a heart in him."

It was the same moon twenty-four hours older that tempted Olivia to join a group on the meeting-house steps as she came home from getting the late mail and from loitering along with Prunella under the elms. Prunella had had much to say, scornful as she was of her aunt's recent departure from every family tradition and principle, in a visit to the Welling place to see how things looked and to hear that young Posadowski play.

"Aunt Lou did n't see a thing of the Chippendale table she pretended she went to see about," Prunella had said. "Of course Millicent Chappell took it with all the other old trash — or else the Polanders burnt it for kindling wood. Why not? If there 's one thing I hate it 's old furniture. Life 's full enough of memories and things without having the very chair you sit in haunted, besides being shaky in the legs."

"Oh, Prunella! How can you! And did Miss Hollins say that everything is changed, quite changed?"

"Absolutely! Ploughs and hoes and rakes in the war-room, and tubs and a washing-machine in the dining-room. And chickens in the front hall, Olivia, pecking around and making themselves perfectly at home! Hideous, is n't it! But the parlor was all right — that is, quite empty except for the piano and the curtains."

"And did he play for her without its killing her, Prunella? Does he know anything at all about music?"

"Killing her!" Prunella exclaimed in a different tone. "Why, Aunt Lou says he 's a perfect genius. Aunt Lou has heard Blind Tom and she says Stefan Posadowski plays much better. He played something about a polonaise, by one of his own people, and Aunt Lou says it was glorious — that it made her want to dance or fight or die or do something. Imagine Aunt Lou dancing or fighting!" And Prunella laughed, and then grew suddenly silent.

"I must go on home," Olivia said. "Mamma will be waiting. Can't you walk a little farther, Prunella?"

They were in the shadow of the lilac bushes in Mrs. Archibald's yard. Prunella put her hand quickly on Olivia's shoulder. "No, I can't go any farther," she answered, with a little breath-

lessness. "But I'm going to say something, Olivia. We've been friends always, haven't we? You'll snub me, of course. But I don't care. I've got to say it. You see, if I weren't postmistress, I should n't know. But, Olivia, it makes me afraid — so — so many letters from Dacre — and to Dacre. You're so fine and he's so — so — "

Olivia drew quite away with a little laugh. "But, my dear, a postmistress does n't have to make up romances about the letters that she gives out," she said with a ring in her voice that Prunella expected. "And if Mamma and I don't help poor Dacre, who will, pray? I never knew there was that side to being postmistress. It must be a bore. Good-night!"

And then she went on across the street, and Prunella went her way back to see if she had n't left the side window in the post-office open.

"Prunella was saucy and deserved a reproof," Olivia was saying to herself, feeling the Paris letter in her blouse to be sure it had not fallen out. And, besides, such a report had to be stopped at once, nipped right in the bud. It would kill her mother. And besides — besides — no one had a right to say anything. Her life was her own. And what did little, narrow, hard-

working Prunella know about life and love! When school opened, in a month, she would have Dacre send the letters there so that Prunella could n't keep count. And anyhow —

But her bitter reflections came to a sudden end. Out of the shadows of the meeting-house porch which she was just passing, there came to her, in the soft Gaelic inflection, words so remote from her thought that she was startled into stopping to hear more: —

"And of the young girls of Ireland, Emer was the one to whom Cuchulain's heart was going out, for she had the six gifts: the gift of beauty, for she was as beautiful as a lily on the altar at the Eastertime; and the gift of voice, for her speaking was like the waterfalls in the spring; and the gift of sweet speech, for always she was saying what was like honey in the hearts of those who heard; and the gift of needlework, for she sewed as fine as do the little people on the gossamers they do be wearing; and the gift of wisdom, for always she went understanding the meanings of things; and the gift of pureness, for her soul she was keeping as white as the spire high above there in the moonshine. And it was in very rich clothes that Cuchulain was coming to win Emer for his wife. His

tunic was crimson and his shirt of finest white silk embroidered in red gold, and his brooch was of inlaid gold. And the Lady Emer and the other young girls were sitting out on the green grass under the shade of the trees by the side of a silvery stream, and presently they were hearing the creaking of the wheels of a chariot and the clatter of hoofs. 'Let one of you see,' said the Lady Emer, 'what is it that is coming towards us.' And the Lady Emer's heart was beating up in her throat, and she guessing who it was that was coming so brave over the green grass."

Olivia had sat down behind one of the big columns. The surprise of the situation had driven away her irritation. It was Bride Joyce there on the porch, telling stories to the village children, to the very children that would come to the district school in the fall. She could quite plainly see their upturned, ecstatic little faces, but not the story-teller; the column behind which Olivia sat hid them from each other. However, it is not likely there would have been a break in the telling, even had the story-teller known of the addition to her audience. Her tone was too rapt and far away for her to be aware of those who listened.

"And always you must be remembering the six gifts," she was going on, "for the girl who has them will be loved by the holy angels themselves. And so Cuchulain got down from his chariot and came proud over the green grass to the young girls and was wishing a blessing on them. And the Lady Emer lifted up her lovely face and saw Cuchulain, and it is what she said —"

A man came round the corner and stopped at the steps. "Bride," he said gently, with a little laugh, "is it all night you will be keeping the little ones with your tales?"

"Faith, is it yourself!" she laughed back. "But I cannot stop here and leave the young girls staring at Cuchulain and him smiling at Emer. If you 'll be so good as to wait."

He did not look at Olivia as he sat down on the lower step and tossed away his cigar. When the story was in full swing again, she got up softly from behind her column.

"I, too, have been listening," she whispered, with a friendliness that surprised him, as she passed. "It is a beautiful story that your sister is telling. Good-night!"

He sprang to his feet. "My sister will be very glad and very proud that you will be

thinking it is a beautiful story," he answered. "Good-night!"

And she went off down the shadowy old street saying over to herself the six gifts.

"And the gift of sweet speech, for always she was saying what was like honey in the hearts of those who heard," she recalled. "But then Prunella was saucy," she added to console herself. "And that day in the town hall — oh, dear, it was so hideous and he was so — so surprising."

Meanwhile, Prunella too was going through a process of self-reproach. She had found the side window closed and barred and then had run home with a heavy heart. The house was quite dark except for the light of a candle in Miss Hollins's room. Every night, before reading her chapter, Miss Hollins put down, itemized, "Cakes made, — Money taken in, — Money paid out." After relieving her mind of these important mundane matters, she turned to the Psalms or Isaiah or John.

When Prunella came in that night, white and stern-lipped, Miss Hollins was just at Isaiah, xxvi, 3, and a moth had made the candle sputter.

"Aunt Lou," she said, tugging at her collar,

"I've made Olivia furious. I had to. I don't care."

Miss Hollins snuffed the candle. "She'll get over it, Prunella. When you were children, she was always a little topping. She gets it from her mother. But she comes out all right in the end. And she and Dacre are n't married yet."

"Oh, don't, Aunt Lou. Don't even say it. It makes me wish I'd gone on and told her all. She frightened me so. I'd just begun."

"All, Prunella?" Miss Hollins had taken off her glasses and there was a gentle youthful look in her clear hazel eyes. Down her back, over the blue kimono, hung her heavy braids of curly, gray-tinged chestnut hair.

"Yes, Aunt Lou — all! I wish I had. I've never told you or anybody. Olivia need n't be so satisfied and so sarcastic. If she knew that I saw, — myself, — one night coming home late from the office, in the spring, — by the fence in the shade of Mrs. Archibald's lilac bushes just where we stood to-night and she was so snippy — that I saw Dacre Welling kissing — yes, kissing, Aunt Lou, and holding quite close in his arms — that skinny, brown, long-eyed Sofia Letchikoff."

"Prunella! Are you sure!"

"Well, I didn't dream it, Aunt Lou, and you know I never could imagine things. In school I never could. Now, do you wonder?"

Quite suddenly and irrelevantly Miss Hollins laughed. "Well, it's a mercy Dacre's given that way. It's a relief. Why, don't you see, Prunella? It's as clear as day. If he wanted to kiss and hug that ugly, snaky little creature, just think what he'll be up to in Paris. He'll never wait for Olivia. Thank God!"

CHAPTER XII

NITROGEN NODULES

As a result of the ploughing under of leguminous and other crops for green manure, the productiveness of the soil has been greatly increased. The decomposition of vegetable matter in the soil stimulates desirable activities and corrects the evil effects of the excessive use of high-grade fertilizers. Clover, alfalfa, soy beans—"

Olivia turned another page in her notebook and looked at her watch. Eleven thirty-three and desperately hot. Seven minutes more of lecture, and then fertilizer tables to copy off the board. The row of chairs in front of her, six in number, were filled as follows: Joyce, P. D.; Kershaw, M. H.; Kidder, S. R.; Kleber, Maria T.; Klein, F.; Knight, Isabel Y.

Olivia began her row, just behind Joyce, P. D., in the end seat by the window, with the view of the hot, dry campus, shaded at intervals by splendid elms, and of the shallow pond with the lily-pads; on beyond, the trolley track, and beyond that, more sered campus and more red-brick buildings. The only refreshing thing in

her range of vision was the drinking-fountain, with its sanitary plunger, in a circle of moist, living green. Now and then a student paused and, from a safe distance and with due deliberation, projected a cool draught into his mouth.

After a quite impersonal, but entirely genial good-morning, Mr. Joyce had absorbed himself wholly in the lecture, occasionally making answer, with ready accuracy, to the problems in fertilization that the lecturer tossed off with terrifying ease. So absorbed was he in calculating nitrogen to the acre that he was oblivious of the arrival of a minute grasshopper upon the shoulder of his white flannel coat, then upon the collar. It was Olivia's discovery of this intruder that brought her to a full stop after "soy beans." Should she tell Mr. Joyce? But before she could answer the question and do him a favor, the grasshopper removed himself by a long leap to the brim of the Panama of Knight, Isabel Y., and Olivia was aware of being tired, and looked at her watch.

Afterwards, in the interval between the lecture and the trolley that took her home, a matter of forty minutes, she found a seat under a thick-leaved maple, tagged with its scientific name and the date of its planting. All around

grew heavy-headed red clover, with now and then a patch of fragrant alsike. It was the best of opportunities to study the nitrogen nodules on the roots, she was thinking, reaching for a specimen. But somehow, in all that shimmer and heat, her mind would not occupy itself with nitrogen nodules. There was that Mr. Joyce waiting for the trolley over near the track. He certainly did not seem to be forcing his brain into any uncongenial activity. He was prone upon his back in the shade, smoking. All she could really see of him, indeed, was a long white line in the crushed grass, and now and then a little blue cloud of smoke. She would be just as idle herself. So she threw herself back and looked up at the sky through the clover-tops and the grass plumes. Then across her thought floated a little pang. At first she did not at once recognize it, there had been of late so many pangs introduced into her experience. Then it asserted itself as a Dacre pang, left by the letter that had inspired Prunella's sauciness. And yet it was in no sense a pang-making letter. On the contrary, it was a very gay, light-hearted one, dated from a little sky studio in delightful Rue Notre Dame des Champs, with its little glimpse of the Luxembourg Gar-

dens over the two snapdragons and the three wallflowers and the box of mignonette and the fauvette's cage. And it was full of déjeuners at Meudon, of sketching in the Bois, of the jolly models, of Alexis Orloff, who had taken half the little apartment with him, and was an old Parisian and knew Paris like a book — and would take good care of him! Quite innocent of any pang-making intent, surely, were Dacre's scrawled pages, with their odor of cigarettes; and quite loverlike enough to make her cheeks aspire to a clover pink were the closely written lines at the end. But yet, somehow, there was a disappointment in the letter, and she lay there analyzing herself, chiding herself, and then planning over and over the old plans until Mr. Joyce's gradual emergence from the grass just in her line of vision reminded her to look at her watch.

It was a little annoying that he held the trolley for her as she ran breathlessly up the slope, and then took her books and helped her in, all the while confessing that he had been quite asleep and that sheer luck had awakened him. But after he had seated her and restored her property, she had no further occasion for annoyance; for he removed himself to the front bench

with the motorman and a small barefooted boy bearing a string of fish, and presently seemed to have forgotten his recent gallantry in tender and critical examination of pumpkinseed and perch. The small boy moved quite close up to him, and, from casual beginnings, they were soon plunged into what appeared to be a most absorbing conversation. Animated it certainly was, for they laughed much, and frequently the motorman turned around and took part, and the conductor swung on the step and joined in. Mr. Joyce had removed his hat, and as they flew along his crinkled dark hair blew out in quite boyish fashion. Olivia watched the fireweed and the daisies by the way and thought of the déjeuners at Meudon as she held on her hat.

The arrival at the turnout by Ashton Ponds broke up the sociability on the front seat. The motorman and the conductor found surprising and uncomfortable orders waiting for them over the telephone. Forest fires had got to the bridge over Ball's Creek and there was n't safe passing. Men were hard at work and in an hour or so — and so forth and so forth. Meanwhile, they were to wait where they were.

And it was by no means a bad place to wait. Not twenty feet from the track, down through

birches and reeds and rushes, gleamed very cool and fresh the softly lapping water. A boat was beached there, and not far away up the shore there was a little cottage. Beyond birch tops, the Ponds stretched away into the shadow of the hills, darkly still and inviting.

Olivia resigned herself to the inevitable and got out her notebook. Mr. Joyce and the boy, after some parley with the motorman and the conductor, clambered down the bank to the boat and stood looking and talking. Then, quite calmly and quite as if he were not doing the most extraordinary and daring thing he had ever done in his life, Mr. Joyce turned around, and, springing up the bank, came over to where Olivia sat pondering these inspiring words: "The second plan of soil improvement is to increase the humus content of the soil by the use of more stable manure." She had so little idea of his audacious intention that she did not lift her eyes until he stood at the step and, raising his hat, said quite simply, —

"The little lad and I are going out in the boat, the way it will not seem so long and so hot, the wait. Will you not come with us? He is a jolly little lad."

The answer her mind made to this perfectly

commonplace and yet overwhelming proposal was instantly resentful. Then, quite suddenly and irrelevantly, she remembered the "jolly models" and the "déjeuners at Meudon." The resentment of the remembrance made her color rosily as she answered hesitatingly, —

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Why not? Are we to wait long?"

"We are, indeed. 'T will be a good hour before we go. And for myself, I cannot be so near the water and not on it. And to pull at the oars will be better than to sit in the car in the heat."

All the while he was helping her down the high step and then holding her books as she sprang lightly on down among the birches to the boat. The small boy with the fish had already put them under the seat, and stood throwing stones at a mud turtle swimming a little offshore. He was a very freckled, large-eared, blue-eyed boy, in process of getting some square white teeth.

"Goin' to fish?" he said, in a businesslike fashion, as Joyce steadied the boat for Olivia to step in. "I've got eleven worms left. And Potts up at that cottage, he 's got lines."

"Oh, no, thank you! It would hardly be

worth the getting ready for so short a time. If we can catch a bit of breeze in a shady spot, it will be luck enough."

"And anyhow, have n't you enough fish?" Olivia laughed as she settled herself in the stern.

She laughed more at herself than at the lad, seeing herself in her novel situation. And in a way it was quite a little adventure, going for a row with a young Irishman about whom she knew nothing more nor better than that he had a picturesque sister who told unusual stories, and that his uncle held every foot of her own old home on a heavy mortgage. It was truly a situation that was full of romantic suggestion as well as of practical opportunity. It would be no waste of time to be gracious to the family to whom all her paternal acres so nearly belonged. And then — she admitted the fact grudgingly as Joyce tossed off coat and hat and took up the oars — he was certainly a very highbred-looking young Irishman with an unquestionably good manner. With all his courtliness, he was just aloof enough to be interesting.

"Faith, and Miss Ladd does n't know a fisherman, the way a whole boatful of fish would not be enough," he exclaimed as the lad scrambled in. "It is of that we 've been telling tales in

the car, of how many we have been after catching and how many we are wanting to catch."

"You beat us all holler," said the boy. "I'd like to try it wunst in your country. Tell some more."

They were following the shore under the dipping boughs of chestnuts and maples. Down close to the water clustered the white button-bushes with their jasmine scent. Clouds of iridescent blue dragonflies skimmed the shallows. A fresh little air touched Olivia's hot cheeks. She too took off her hat, and threw it with gloves and books on the seat beside her. Joyce looked at her for the first time directly, with a quiet smile.

"Not now, my lad," he was answering. "Here it is sweet in its own way and 'twould be spoiling it to talk of Glen Inagh and Ballynahinch and Derryclare. And it 's a little cooler ye are, Miss Ladd?"

He was thinking quickly that he had spoken the truth when he had said that here it was sweet in its own way. The last time he had been in a boat with a girl, it had been Aileen who had sat in the bow against a background of sparkling sea and deep blue sky, and in her scarlet cap, the young gull's wing he had

given her. Now against a background of green branches and sunflecked water there sat opposite him a gray-eyed young woman of whom at first he had been a little afraid. But facing her half-wearied quiet, and remembering the shadow picture of ten days before, he felt much more at his ease. "And the little breeze? Y're catching it?" he said. He could see that it had caught her, for it was blowing the soft hair around her ears and lifting the ends of her black four-in-hand tie.

"Oh, yes! And it is delicious! It is much nicer even than — than soy beans!"

He laughed aloud, heartily. "And yet it is what I have been thinking, that y're in love with soy beans and alfalfa, y're that quiet behind me."

"This morning, though, I almost spoke to you," she said. "For a minute you were in — in great peril."

"In great peril, was I? And you going to save me?"

"It was averted," she went on, with a little smile, watching him critically. At any rate, his hands were pleasant to see, brown and shapely and muscular, and his tan was the real burn of the sailor, which no amount of inland air ever

takes off. "It was a small grasshopper, and it left you for Miss Knight at the end of the row."

At this the little lad burst into a peal of round laughter. "Gee! But I bet she was scared," he exclaimed. "Once I did that to the teacher — I put a grasshopper in the drawer of her desk, and was n't she in a fit!" And again he laughed his delight in reminiscence.

"You did, did you?" Olivia said, with an answering laugh, beginning to be very pleasantly aware of the little lad. "And where do you go to school?"

"Oh, to the North Fernfield District School. She was a fearful scary one, anyhow, she was. Even fishworms in desks made her squirm."

Joyce laughed, and looked at Olivia with a friendly understanding in his eyes. Her eyes were friendly, too, and more merry than he had ever seen them.

"Are you going to be a scary one?" he said. "Shall you be minding fishworms in the desks?"

"Oh, no! I shall not be a scary one," she said valiantly. And then she went on to the little lad as he sat perched in the stern with his arms around his yellow khaki knees, "And do you think you would put grasshoppers in my

desk if I were ever to be teacher in your school?"

He surveyed her for a moment. "You would n't screech if I did. That's the fun, when they screech!" Then his face broke into a broad smile, and he reddened. "Gee! Are you going to?" he said.

Olivia colored, too. It was something of a plunge to admit it, this approaching experiment of hers, and with Mr. Joyce looking on and remembering that first day!

"Yes, I'm going to," she answered. "And I'm glad to know you. You'll help me, won't you?"

"I can chop wood and — and run the stove," he explained proudly. "And the chestnuts will soon be ripe. And it's nice, recess under the trees. You'll soon get used to things."

"It is what you will be, Miss Ladd's protector," Joyce said as they rounded a point close under spreading willow and wild honeysuckle. A bass leaped silver and then down again through swift widening circles.

The boy sprang up. "Whew! D'ye see that? Wish I'd been trolling! That was a three-pounder, I'll bet."

"He was very glad you are not trolling, the way he can go back to his home in the pickerel

weed and the lily-pads," Joyce laughed. "And some other time you and I can come out here and catch him."

"All right! When? I'll get the worms."

"Oh, some fine day when you are after having excellent lessons, and after putting a nosegay in Miss Ladd's desk."

Miss Ladd and her pupil laughed, too.

"And what is your name?" she asked. "And do you live in North Fernfield?"

He reddened again. "Dad says it's a fancy name. Mother named me. Dad's name is Pratt Smith. Mother named me Byron, but people always say 'By.' That ain't so bad, is it?"

"There, By! Faith, it's a lily there at the side of y', and it's what Miss Ladd is wanting, is it not, Miss Ladd?"

By leaned over and dipped down deep into the clear, shadowed water.

"Next to fishin', gimme this!" he said ecstatically, drawing out the dazzling, tremulous flower and passing it on to Joyce. "In our pond there's just about a million. You got 'em in your country?"

Joyce handed the lily to Olivia.

"Oh, thank you!" she said. "It is just what I was wanting."

And she looked at him now quite as cloudlessly as if he had been any other man than the man he was; and quite irrelevantly there popped into his head the little apple-blossom song that she had broken into so ruthlessly on that first morning. And, indeed, it was very much pleasanter not to be bitter against this young lady who could smile so winningly into the eyes of a boy and look so happy over the gift of a flower. Probably to some other man she showed as radiant and lovely as Aileen showed to him.

"Why, if you are Pratt Smith's son," she was going on to By over Joyce's shoulder, "you must live in that fine old place with the big pond, up Exeter way. Of course I remember it. And you come all that way to the North Fernfield school?"

By dropped his eyes and frowned down at the fish feebly splashing in the bottom of the boat.

"That's our place, but"—he hesitated—"but we don't live there. Mr. Stopolski lives in it and he lets me fish. That's where I got these fish. And you see at our pond you can fish right off the bank and that's safer — that is, for mother."

"Some day, when you are a man, you must

buy back the place," Olivia said with a little deepening of color. " It 's a very beautiful old place."

" Not much ! " By exclaimed. And then to Joyce, " Would you ? "

Joyce's right oar circled the boat slowly round towards the trolley track. He gave Olivia a quick little glance that was half an appeal.

" Faith, and it is what I never would do, to take the old places away from those who love them," he said, watching the swirl of the water. " I would let the other man do that and I would buy only of those who have no love in their hearts for the old places."

" I 'd rather go to your country," By went on, quite seriously. " Dad says that here all the places are fished out. And was it true — honest true — what you told about the trout — about the white trout that was enchanted ? Tim Leary, that conductor, he said he 'd heard about it, too."

" It was fairy true, my lad," Joyce answered, ready for Olivia when she would turn and smile with him. " Y' see, there are two kinds of true, and both are true. There 's honest true and fairy true. And the white trout is fairy true, and the trout in Glen Inagh almost jumping into your hand, that is honest true."

The clanging of the trolley bell made him straighten up and quicken his strokes. Olivia took up her hat.

"Of course they 'll wait for us, won't they?" she exclaimed. It suddenly seemed to her that it would be annoying to have a boat-ride with Mr. Patrick Joyce the cause of her missing a trolley. The clanging of the bell had reasserted the conventions with their usual strength. And what would Prunella say should she hear of the adventure!

"Oh, yes! They will wait for us. It is what we agreed, that they would give us time to get back." He was silent for a moment, sending the boat swiftly through the water in long, quiet strokes. Olivia was pinning her hat on and smoothing back the blown hair under its brim.

"Afterwards — to be thinking that you came — it will be more like fairy true than honest true," he said presently.

Olivia swept him with a glance. It was stupid to have to acknowledge that his eyes and voice were nice.

"Oh, thank you!" she said. "It has been great fun. And then to meet By. That was providential."

By was holding his perch and pumpkinseed over the stern for a cooling dip.

"Roman and Leo Krakoski, they fill the water-cooler," he said genially; "and Apollonia and Stefanya, they 'll help you lots."

"And with you to show me, too," Olivia answered as genially. "Oh, I shall not be so afraid."

But she was thinking, all the time, of the rest of the trolley ride, and wondering whether Mr. Joyce would take the seat beside her, and what there would be to talk about, and how it was that he seemed so much more endurable than he had seemed that day in the town hall. But she soon found that all her anxious speculation was quite unnecessary. After helping her back to her former seat and receiving her thanks with the wholly impersonal assertion with which he had justified the invitation, that the boat ride was better than sitting there in the heat, Mr. Joyce lifted his hat and resumed his place on the front platform, in the good company of By and the motorman.

CHAPTER XIII

THAT PEDDLER

Six dozen kisses, Robbie. It's been a day's work to make them. And you will be careful and pull the wagon gently. Kisses are so perishable. And tell Mr. Sibley to be careful in putting them on the train. And then, of course, the Grange ladies will be on hand to take them off in Flagfield. They know all about kisses. Now I can trust you, Robbie." And Miss Hollins gave a final tug to the cord that held the pile of cake-boxes on Robbie's little red express wagon.

It had been a busy time since three o'clock that morning, when the day had begun for her. In the season, when the countryside was full of summer visitors, and church suppers and Grange meetings were numerous, she always began the day when the sun began it, and left Prunella sound asleep in the big fourposter. And it was really the sweetest time of the day there in the cool kitchen, with the roses fresh under the south window, and the east like a rose, and

all the back yards on each side of her own dewy and quiet. It was a good way to begin work, in all that still loveliness, after a cup of coffee and a chapter in Psalms.

Robbie's wagon successfully arrived at the corner of the street and passed out of Miss Hollins's sight as she leaned over the gate. Eleven o'clock was just striking. Prunella was gone to start the outgoing mail. The boarders had all gone on a picnic except Miss Kirk. She was knitting on the side porch in the shade of the clematis. Miss Hollins stooped to pull some straggling dandelions out of Prunella's neat grassplot. The roots were firm, and it took some tugging to get them up.

It was while she was tugging and pulling, with her back to the gate, that an automobile, as shining and big and noiseless as the chariot of Phœbus himself, rolled up to her curbing and stopped. However, it was no Phœbus that drove it, and no immortal that sat upon the back seat among the baskets of beans and tomatoes and carrots and beets. It was Mr. Patrick Joyce, unhelmeted and in the array of an ordinary young man, who acted as charioteer, and who, when he had brought the chariot to a soft stop, and had a moment's parley with

the more elderly mortal in the rear, promptly opened the pages of the "New York Herald" and buried himself in the polo and cricket and golf news. Meanwhile, the more elderly mortal, who, after all, was not so very elderly, and had a most youthful twinkle in his blue eyes, alighted with some dignity and much caution, lest he be followed by a cascade of vegetables. Once free of his vegetarian surroundings and with his hand on the latch of Miss Hollins's small green gate, he looked something between a Member of Parliament and a skipper, with his fine crop of white hair and his ruddy skin and the white vest he wore with his dark blue flannels.

Miss Hollins heard the gate click. She would be ready for that peddler who always got in before you knew it, she said to herself, giving a final tug.

"I beg your pardon," said the intruder suavely. "I want just a — "

"It's a waste of time," she began sharply — then sprang up and reddened as rosily as Prunella did under fire. "Oh, excuse me! I did not realize," she added, ice forming as she went on. What did Michael Joyce want there, anyhow, surprising her. And at such an hour,

before she had changed into a fresh percale, and with such hands!

"Good-morning, Miss Hollins," he said, as gravely as if she were receiving him in highest state. "May I speak with y' just a minute? It's a great favor y'll be doing me."

As he spoke there came a plaintive voice from behind the hedge on the other side of the street, calling "Sollie! Sollie! Come, Sollie!" Solomon, Mrs. Clabby's maltese, was always missing when anything of interest was occurring at a neighbor's.

"Of course you may," Miss Hollins said, not suavely, holding her dandelions. "Come up on the porch where it's shady." She could n't hide his automobile from Jane Clabby, but she could keep her from watching the interview. "Take a chair while I wash my hands. Dandelion roots take a lot of pulling." And she went in and let the screen door slam and washed her hands at the sink. What could have brought him? He had n't been near enough to speak to since that day ten years ago when the deeds were signed. And the grassplot would n't come out of her fingernails. And her face was red as a beet. The little glass in the kitchen told her so. If Prunella were only there!

On the porch she found him seemingly quite cool and unperturbed. He had not obeyed her and sat down, but stood by the little sewing-table where she and Prunella kept their work, holding his fine white Panama hat.

"I'll not be keeping y' a moment," he said promptly and smilingly. "It is what I have come about, a little table that I found in the Welling house that's likely belonging to y'."

"A little table!" she exclaimed, amazed and melting. "There was a little table. Won't you sit down?"

When she had taken the Windsor rocker, he seated himself formally on the edge of the long bench. Evidently he purposed the briefest of calls.

"It is a little table with drawers all inlaid and with foine glass knobs, and it's not in the list Mrs. Chappell has been so kind as to send me," he went on in a most businesslike fashion. "Y' see, the young gentleman went so soon and left everything; the way I 've been that puzzled to know about the things."

"It was disgraceful the way Dacre went off. I don't wonder you 've been puzzled," Miss Hollins said emphatically. "But that 's always been his way. He 's a spoiled boy."

"Poor lad! It will go hard with him, the wurrld. But it was Bride, my niece, who was after finding out the table belonged to y'. There was a bit of paper pasted in the bottom of one of the drawers, and it saying the table was the gift of Mrs. Hollins to Mrs. Welling. Faith, it's Bride has eyes for finding things and seeing into things."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" Miss Hollins cried softly. "That's the very table. I've been longing to get it. I told Prunella so. It was my mother's wedding gift to Dacre Welling's grandmother. Oh, I am very glad."

"And it is what I am, too, very glad. There's a heart in the old things, sure!" he exclaimed, a little ruddier than before. "I'll send it down to y' right away. And Bride will be glad. It is like an inchantment that is on her, she to be always seeing into things and into the right of them."

"I know she does," Miss Hollins found herself saying almost warmly, leaning forward in the Windsor rocker. "Every one says beautiful things about her. And she seems so cheerful. She must make you very happy."

He was carefully creasing the crown of his hat as an embarrassed boy would have done.

"She does, she does!" he said. "Poor lass! But it 's a heavy heart she has in her, and she so gay."

"A heavy heart!" Miss Hollins exclaimed. "Why, she seems a perfect ray of sunshine." Not of rays was she thinking, but of what a remarkably clean-looking man he was. It had not seemed possible a man could look so clean. And how nice he was about the table. If he had come fifteen minutes later, he would n't have caught her in that soiled —

"Y' see, she 's homesick, Bride is," he was going on. "She and Pat were left motherless bairns, and then three year ago my brother, their father, went down in a winter gale off Killery. But at home in the ould country the nuns were always mothering her, and she had her poor. But here, y' see, there 's no woman to mother her and she 's that slow in making friends with the gur-rls. We do our best, Pat and I, the way she won't be always wishing herself in the ould country. But it 's a heavy heart she has in her, poor colleen."

"Why — why, send her to see me, poor child!" Miss Hollins heard herself saying. "Of course she 's homesick. Who would n't be! Prunella would — be delighted."

He looked up quickly with eyes suddenly grown soft. "What use will it be, I to try to thank y'!" he said. "'T was I that brought her to this country, and to know she's grieving under her blitheness! And it is indeed quite different for a young lass, this great country after little ould Ireland, God bless it!" He got up and stood a moment, still fumbling his hat.

"To be quite honest with y'," he hesitated, "I had another reason for coming and taking y'r time. But I should not be daring to come without my knowing y're a great business woman —that facts are facts to y', just as they are to a man, and that y' don't let sintimint get away with good sinse."

Miss Hollins again grew rosy. "I try to be. I've had to be," she said.

"Now it was this way. I know that y're thrifty and y' would n't want to see potatoes and beans and beets and cabbages and all the rest of the garden lying there in the sun, the way they're rotting and no one to be ating them. And so — so —" he paused and settled the gold-rimmed eyeglasses on the black ribbon. "Ye've the head of a man even if y've the heart of a woman, and so you 'll let one of the lads bring ye down fresh vegetables every morn-

ing. Faith, they 're lazy lubbers, are the lads, and the stuff that 's peddled y' is n't worth a baubee, and the waste in the fields is a sin. Sure, I brought down some garden stuff this morning, seeing I was coming. Y' won't mind?"

Miss Hollins had grown as pale as he had grown ruddy while he stammered on. They would choke her, the vegetables from those fields. And yet how could she hurt him! Forty dollars last month for green groceries. Tired Prunella out in the hot sun hoeing the little garden. The goodness of God! Had n't her Psalm said so that very morning! "In the shadow of His wing!" And the kindness of the man!

"Why, yes, I will, gladly," she said bluntly, holding out her hand. "It 's a big item, fresh vegetables. And when you 've always been used to your own gardens. You 're very, very kind. I did n't think at first I could let you do such a thing, but I — I can." The mist had come on her spectacles, and he was shaking her hand warmly.

Then he whistled softly. "Pat," he cried. "Suppose y' be laving Miss Hollins the vegetables I was bringing down to kape the bur-rds from gorging themselves into early graves."

And with smiling alacrity Mr. Patrick Joyce presently had the little porch gay with the baskets, and fragrant from a great bunch of flowers that lay atop of the lettuce.

"They 're Bride's cutting, the posies," Mr. Joyce was saying, as he and Patrick bowed themselves down the steps. "And the table I 'll send y' by the very first lad that 's handy."

"And Bride must come down very soon," Miss Hollins called after them. "Prunella will be delighted."

As the big car rolled away with a great lifting of hats, faintly from across the street came the call, "Sollie! Sollie! Come, Sollie!"

Miss Hollins collapsed into the Windsor rocker. What would Prunella say? What would she say! But what else could a Christian do! And they were beautiful vegetables. Such tomatoes! And the man was kind and clean and decent and—and vegetables were high in the dry weather. "And if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest aught that thou hast against thy brother, go first and be reconciled with thy brother." And "Blessed are the peacemakers." That was plain Bible teaching. Prunella could have nothing to say against that anyhow. And Bride! Any woman

would do as much for a lonely girl. Suppose it were Prunella! But what would Prunella say!

When Prunella came home at one o'clock, hot and tired after the opening of the noon mail, she dropped wearily into her place at the table without going out on the back porch, whither Miss Hollins and Robbie had transported the vegetables. The flowers had been gayly and fragrantly disposed in various parts of the house, the sweet-peas on the dining-room table. But Prunella was too weary to be observant.

Miss Hollins sipped her last cup of tea thoughtfully.

"And what do you think, Aunt Lou! It's just what you'd expect, of course. There's going to be a concert next week — yes, a concert — in the town hall, for the benefit of the library, and who — who" — the piece of cold lamb Prunella was impaling refused to stay on her fork — "and who do you suppose is going to play?"

"Why, your Polander, of course. Why should n't he play? He 's a genius if there was ever one. And prejudice, Prunella —"

"My Polander! Aunt Lou! How perfectly absurd! And Dr. Britton says he plays every

day with that Polish priest. Dr. Britton can hear quite plainly in his study. I had to buy two tickets. You and Miss Kirk might go, Aunt Lou. I loathe music. You know I do." And she put another spoonful of mayonnaise on the plump Joyce tomato.

Miss Hollins set down her cup with a little rattle and folded her napkin.

"Prunella," she said sharply, "I may as well tell you. You'll see for yourself in a minute. And you need n't make a bit of fuss. I know my duty and I 'm going to do it. And there 's no use in the world in keeping up all this prejudice against foreigners. They 've come and they 're going to stay. That 's the very thing Dr. Britton said so splendidly in his sermon, and that, after all, we are n't any better than they. Goodness knows, we old families need something to start us on again."

Prunella had finished the tomato, but she held a saltine poised, too amazed to bite. "Why, Aunt Lou! What is the matter? I'll go to the old concert and send your Stefan a — "

"It 's not that, Prunella. It 's the Joyces. Mr. Michael Joyce called here this morning. Yes, here, Prunella, and I was a sight for the gods in my soiled dress, with such hands! I

was on my knees pulling dandelions, and I thought he was that impudent tin peddler that sneaks in before you know it. I did n't hear the automobile at all. And he 's found my little inlaid table up at the old Welling place and — and — and after this, he 's — he 's going to supply us with vegetables, Prunella." Miss Hollins was taking her napkin out of the ring and carefully refolding it and putting it back again.

"Will it be — be — much cheaper, Aunt Lou?"

"Cheaper, Prunella! Why, don't you understand? It is going to cost us nothing — to be a — a kind of convenience to — to Mr. Joyce. I know how it used to be in Father's time. We just had to throw away the vegetables."

"Aunt Lou! Of all the terrible come-downs! Why, they would choke me — under those conditions."

"That tomato did n't choke you, child. And you 've not been suffocated by the sweet-peas. That 's sense — and — and Christianity, Prunella."

CHAPTER XIV

THEN STEFAN PLAYED

"You're growing thinner, Olivia. Last time I could hardly get the hooks together. And now! There you are!" And Mrs. Ladd gave a final pat to the butterfly bow that finished the high waist-line of the blue crepe gown. Then she stood a moment looking at Olivia in the glass, watching her fasten the old seed-pearl brooch in the soft folds. "I used to look like you, dear," she said presently, with a little sigh.

The pin was fastened. "Only a million times better than I can ever look, Mamma," Olivia protested. She was brushing back her hair into a more severe line. That was what Dacre always had said, that the lines around her cheek and ear were her best lines. Under her filmy surplice was hidden his most recent letter. "I can never approach your ivory miniature, Mamma. That has forever discouraged me." She laughed and then rummaged for her white gloves. She had to look away. It hurt too much, seeing her mother's face there so close to her own in the

lamplight, against the dim background of the high-ceiled old room. So like her own, and yet every line in high relief — wrinkle, hollow, crowsfoot, tired eyes, faded hair, against her own curve and glow and shine! "Besides, Mamma, youth is terribly crude and unripe and glaring."

"Youth is entirely — entirely divine, dear," Mrs. Ladd corrected her, turning away. "Wait till you have a daughter. Then you 'll know the feeling — like — like holding the door of a shrine."

"Why, Mamma! That 's beautiful — what you said. But you don't feel that with me, do you? Why should you? So practical and well-poised a person as I." She was taking the lamp from the high chest of drawers, throwing into light, then into shadow, the big fourposter, the blowing blue and white chintz curtains, the narrow, high mantel-shelf with its string of capped and gowned photographs.

Mrs. Ladd followed with little blue fan and white Liberty cape.

"Yes, with you, of all people," she said as they went down the stairs. "I almost hold my breath to listen for the footsteps of — of invaders into your shrine, Olivia."

"But why, Mamma?" she persisted, putting the lamp in the parlor and coming back into the soft light of the hall. "It is n't reasonable to feel so — with me. I seem to myself so — so over with youth, so dependable. Why should you, Mamma?"

Mrs. Ladd handed her cape and fan and drew her under the Chinese lamp, holding her gently by her shoulders.

"Because, my dearest," she answered, so quietly that Olivia felt that it was very passionately, "because I can see so far back and — and you are the only perfectly lovely thing in my life. Now fly along. You 'll be late for the concert." And she kissed her cheek lightly and turned her half playfully towards the door.

"I 'd much rather stay, Mamma. You 'll be lonely. And it 's a lot of trouble just to hear that Stefan Posadowski play. It will probably be something fearful to listen to."

"No, no! You go on, dear! You 'll see a lot of people, and let them see you. That 's your duty here in the village. Good-bye! I 'm going to read 'Phineas Finn.'"

So Olivia went, down the dark street fragrant from the dewy gardens behind fence and hedge. There were stars in the elm-tops, fireflies

twinkling over the grass, and two blocks ahead, the windows of the town hall bravely aglitter. Olivia walked very slowly. With her mother's words so hot in her memory and Dacre's letter in her bosom, it did not seem possible that she could go on into the crowd and the music. At the open field between Mrs. Egerton's and Sarah Tibbetts's, she stopped quite still. Who would know if she ran off into the darkness and quiet and got herself together? She would like to lie in the cool grass and look up into stars upon stars upon stars. "The only perfectly lovely thing in my life." To be to her mother, that, and to be Dacre's "precious old Sweetheart," to have him "long to kiss and kiss" her "dear mouth," to be pictured sewing by his studio window among the three geraniums and the two snapdragons and the mignonette and the fauvette's cage! She could not think of all that and listen to gay music, and talk and laugh like other people. Out there in the meadow among the fireflies, it would be very still, and she could turn up her skirt and keep it from the dew, and — But then Dacre had said something else. What was it he had said about the little Sicilian with the blue-black hair and the red, red lips, and how he was painting her eating cherries? And what was it he

had said about the omelets she could make, the little cherry-lipped Sicilienne? *Aux cérises, aux framboises, aux confitures!* Such omelets, in a small pan over the charcoal in the studio! Olivia must learn to do omelets *à la Sicilienne!*

She turned back into the path and went on quickly past Mrs. Egerton's arbor vitæ hedge, past Mrs. Archibald's lilac bushes, past the tall white meeting-house. Out through the wide-open doors of the town hall long beams of light fell into the grassy street. The air was softly brightened with calls and laughter, and people in couples and groups came out of the shadow and walked up the beams of light to the high Doric-columned porch. A little to one side of the entrance the Joyces' big touring-car chugged and throbbed. That was Patrick Joyce crossing the headlights. The chugging stopped. Joyce tossed a cigar into the grass and went up the steps. He was in his Tuxedo, without a hat. He stopped a moment and looked her way, down the street. Then he went into the hall. After him, Mrs. Krakoski, with Apollonia and Stefanya in very much-starched white dresses and large hair-bows, came, hurrying up abeam.

"Quick! Quick! It begins! We get no sits.

Quick!" panted Mrs. Krakoski, stepping on her red satin skirt, but stumbling on.

Olivia had got to the foot of the steps. It would be pleasanter to go in with somebody, and that sounded like Prunella's voice across the street. And it was Prunella, in the buff organdie, leading Miss Kirk, the blind boarder. Miss Kirk had a red geranium pinned in the white lace jabot that showed between the folds of her white Shetland shawl.

"Oh, is that you, Prunella? Good-evening, Miss Kirk!" Olivia said, joining them on the beam. "May I go with you? Mamma did n't feel equal to coming."

Miss Kirk held her hand lingeringly.

"Of course. Do! And we 'll keep a seat for Aunt Lou," Prunella answered heartily, giving Olivia one of her quick, admiring glances. "My, but that 's a lovely dress, Olivia! And it 's stunning on you."

"I knew it was a lovely gown," Miss Kirk said in her tremulous blind voice. "It is blue, I think."

"Yes, it 's blue, Miss Kirk — my Rose Day gown."

"And she 's lovely in it, Miss Kirk," Prunella added.

"I can feel that she is," Miss Kirk said softly. "And so are you in yours, Prunella. It will be pleasant to sit between you girls to hear the music. Perhaps I can hear the color. Sometimes I do."

They were going carefully up the steps into the portico, then on into the bright, high hall, with the white walls and the rows of green benches. They were well filled, the old green benches upon which the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of perhaps one third of the then present audience had sat. The grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the other two thirds had known far different scenes for their gatherings.

"There 's Mrs. Wieniaski with her husband," Prunella whispered. "Do look at her picture hat. She 'll have to take it off. I wonder if she 's got her shoes on. I suppose they 're bursting with pride."

Olivia laughed at Prunella's incoherence.

"And there are the Joyces. She 's a beauty if there ever was one. She 's like — like — "

"Like mignonette? " Miss Kirk whispered.

"Yes, just like mignonette," Prunella answered gently. "And do look at Patrick, Olivia. He 's stunning."

Olivia looked, then reddened and looked away.

Why she reddened she did not know. There was nothing to see of the Joyces but the broad back and fine white head of Mr. Michael Joyce; the profile, in softest white gown, of Miss Joyce, studying her programme; and then against the window, with his arm on the sill, and his eyes fixed abstractedly on the bare stage with the grand piano labeled "Weber," Mr. Patrick Joyce. And yet, as she looked away, there came to Olivia a little tremor of excitement at the thought that they were to be greeted sometime during the evening. As foolish as the reddening was the little excitement. But unmistakable was the relief of finding how irreproachable he was in his evening clothes. Somehow, the boat-ride on Ashton Ponds was not half so much of a condescension if he could look as well as that. Her mother would not have been quite so much amused if she could have known that he could look as well as that.

But Prunella was excited, too. After they were seated, Miss Kirk kept her thin hand with its jet and seed-pearl ring on Prunella's arm, and Prunella looked round and reported.

"That 's Miss Mortimer, there in lavender and old lace. She sings first, does n't she?" And Prunella looked at her programme. "'The

Rosary,' Nevin. 'Because,' Lamb. Miss Isabel Geraldine Mortimer," she read. "My, what a name! And this is about as bad: 'Mr. Stefan Posadowski.' I could n't even try to pronounce what he 's going to play except 'polonaise.' And that sounds silly, don't you think so, Miss Kirk? Oh, there 's Mrs. Clabby, Olivia. Do look! Do look at the magenta waist with the jet trimmings! There 's Aunt Lou. You 're next Olivia, Aunt Lou."

And then by the time Miss Hollins was seated and had smoothed out her black china silk so as not to wrinkle it, and was holding the programme close to her nearsighted eyes, there came the hush of beginning.

"Oh, dear! I wish we could talk. I hate the old music!" Prunella whispered.

Miss Kirk pressed her hand. "You won't always," she whispered back.

Prunella's delicate face grew quickly serious. Miss Mortimer had swept to the front of the stage and opened her music. Mr. Tilly, the organist of the meeting-house, went to the piano. Miss Mortimer turned and smiled engagingly at him. He struck, with fine appeal, the opening chord of her first song, and her high, thin soprano followed. When she had finished her numbers,

and accepted her bunch of Killarneys, and given "Annie Laurie" for an encore, and Mrs. Clabby had wiped her eyes, and Mr. Patrick Joyce had whispered to Bride behind his programme, there was another hush and a little wait. Prunella's cheeks flamed. Olivia yawned and let her thoughts go to cherry omelets in the Quartier Latin. Then, to a tremendous applause from the corner occupied by Mrs. Wieniaski's picture hat, Mr. Stefan Posadowski came out through the door on the left. Prunella's heart gave a little jump. Miss Kirk could feel it. He was very pale, and very clear-cut and classic were the lines of his face, with his dark hair tossed back and his tragic eyes deep with excitement. Indeed, his face in its severe, tense beauty, was enough to make Prunella lose a heartbeat, and much more than enough to make her forget his slim, boyish tallness in the badly fitting black suit, with some sort of foreign medal blazing on the lapel of his coat as proudly as a Victoria Cross. He bowed quickly and awkwardly, and fled to the piano, tossing back his hair and looking a little dreamily at the keys. Olivia sat up. Prunella's veins throbbed under Miss Kirk's hand. The applause stopped. For a little minute, the only sound was the locusts outside in the elms.

Then Stefan played. It was Chopin's C Minor Prelude, in the great, sombre chords. Olivia gave a quick sigh. Miss Kirk's little old hand felt Prunella's tide turn. Then long, long memories quickened her own heartbeats under the red geranium in the white lace jabot. He was bending just as lovingly, just as abstractedly over the keys as if he were alone in the empty parlor at the Welling place. Prunella's cheeks had cooled to white roses. Miss Hollins was thinking of the night in Boston when she had heard Blind Tom. And over across the hall, Patrick Joyce leaned his chin in his palm and looked out across the window sill into the dark. Was it about the sea under the cliffs at Killery after a November storm that he was playing? Or was it about the passing away of things, the cry of the change here in the New World, here in the valley, where the old homes were going to strangers away from those who loved them? And then he wondered what it was saying to the proud young woman in blue over on the other side of the hall — what this strange Polish boy was telling her whose forefathers had owned the valley. So interested was he to know that he looked quickly across to her. In that swift glance, he saw that the music was saying much

as she leaned a little forward, a bit flushed, but without the least pride in the look of her. And then, before his eyes had left her, hers had turned his way and they had crossed glances.

When Stefan had finished, struck the last, long, haunting note, and the applause had thundered out and the cheering rung, and Mrs. Wieniaski's picture hat had got quite awry, he sat still, his hands on the keys, waiting.

"Did n't I tell you, Prunella?" Miss Hollins whispered.

"Oh, yes!" Prunella whispered back vaguely. She had grown quite unlike herself in her sudden paleness and quiet.

Miss Kirk had taken her hand away and was leaning over to Olivia to say, "He has caught it — the cry of the heart. And that is genius."

But he had plunged triumphantly into the Waltz in A Flat, and then, on the wing of its passion, with little heed for the applause that it brought, had gone on into the Fantaisie in F Minor. His long brown hands, that were so slow at weeding onions and setting tobacco, gathered up splendid ringing handfuls of harmony, and followed out poignantly, thrillingly, the delicate interludes of melody. It was as though he were saying proudly, "Now that

you believe in me, now that you are beginning to understand, now I will show you what we are, my people, at home in our own sad, brave land. Now you shall hear the ring of swords, the laughter of beautiful women, the tap of high heels and spurs on ballroom floors. Now you shall know how we love and woo and suffer — and die, die — we Poles whom you know only as onion-weeders and tobacco-setters." And he squared his shoulders and tossed back his hair, and looked up proudly, dreamily, half smiling, down over the faces, as he went on from mazourka to mazourka, into the C Sharp Minor Polonaise, the quiet of the "G Minor" and the G Major Nocturnes, and then, with a wild turn of his mood, into the brilliant, reckless abandon of the G Minor Ballade.

Joyce had turned his back to the window and sat leaning towards Bride. Olivia had not looked his way again. She, too, was pale; and beyond her, across Miss Kirk's rapt face with its blind eyes and its little smile, Prunella sat very still and very large-eyed.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! I 'm so glad for him," Miss Hollins was beginning to lean over and say. "Blind Tom —"

But Stefan was coming back from his daring

excursion to the front of the stage, where he had achieved a solemn and awkward bow. He was seating himself, but for a moment he did not play. With his hands on the keys, he looked off across the upturned faces, over beyond Mrs. Wieniaski's picture hat, to Prunella deep in her new dreams. As he looked, smiling faintly, his fingers began to move, and then softly, delicately, tenderly, to pick out, dashed with fantastic trills and surprises, "Yankee Doodle." On he went, at last taking his long look away from Prunella, tossing his melody back and forth, chasing it up and down in all sorts of liquid cadences, dropping it into minors until it was heartbroken, chromatic scaling it, fuguing it and minuetting it. Then suddenly, he stopped for a long, questioning moment, and again lifted his eyes in Prunella's direction. The audience waited breathless, wondering what next was to be done to them by this ambitionless young man who thought himself too good to weed onions and worm tobacco. But this time he did no playing with them. It was the "Doxology" that he began after his eyes had come back to watch his hands peal it out in grand choral fashion. Then again, quite suddenly, the music stopped and he was gone. In

the audience there was a little gasp, then laughter.

Olivia drew a long breath that was really a sigh. Dacre would have loved it. And how it made her miss him — all that passionate music. It did not seem that she could wait all the long, indefinite months without him. And then she rose and found Mr. Patrick Joyce coming down the aisle and looking at her, and she bowed and half smiled, and then felt Mrs. Archibald's hand on her arm. And all the while Miss Hollins was getting rosy as she drew Miss Kirk's arm through hers and bowed to the Joyce family with the certainty that Jane Clabby's eyes were on her.

"It 's been wonderful, ain't it!" Mrs. Archibald was saying. "Such gettin' over the keys I never did see. And who 'd 'a' thought he 'd be able to do it, just a common, ordinary Polander. Of course, when he learns more he 'll play real music."

"I suppose he will," Olivia said, a little vaguely. She was watching Prunella. How pretty she looked, how wonderfully pretty, with her faint color and the little shadows under her eyes! And how grandly, with what an air for simple Prunella, she was bowing to everybody!

Between the parsonage and the Polish church, Stefan was waiting for Father Zujewski. He was lying on the grass by the roadside, looking up at the thick stars, hearing that last ballade as his eyes went from star to star, thinking and thinking of how her color had faded as he had played. Each time he had looked, her face had said more. And he — he had swayed her!

Then he heard Father Zujewski's quick step.

"My boy! It was superb, what you have done," he said, holding out his hand. "You have the great gift. God has been good."

Stefan sprang up and took his hand. "And now do they see?" he said breathlessly. "Now will they believe that there is something better than onions?"

"Oh, yes. Now they see. And you are to go away. Some way they will get the money. And you are to go home, to Poland, and make yourself —"

"But to go away!" Stefan interrupted hotly. "That I will not do. If I go away, then I will have no gift. It is here it has come to me."

"But to study you must go away. With the help of God you will be ever greater and greater. With the help of God! The gift is from God."

They were turning in at the rectory gate. One window in the little church glowed red from the sanctuary lamp. Stefan was silent.

On the doorstep he paused. "I cannot go in. I cannot talk now," he said slowly. "But you must not tell them to send me away. If the gift is from God, then God has — has sent it to me by — by her."

"By her!" exclaimed the other. "Truly by her, by your mother who gave you her great gift in another form."

Stefan wheeled about impatiently. "Ach, no! Not by my mother. By a — by a girl!"

The priest put his hand on the big boy's shoulder. "Then," he said softly, — "then have you two gifts from God. And for the second gift, you must do that thing which is highest with the first. Is it not so?"

CHAPTER XV

THE ECHOES

THAT night, over silent, moonlit Fernfield, Diana and Venus were in the ascendant.

Olivia, in from the August dews, white and large-eyed and very animated, had for answer to her mother's yawning, "Well, how was it? Was the music endurable? And who was there?"

"Why, everybody — Polanders galore — and — and the Joyces. And Patrick Joyce fearfully correct in a Tuxedo. Imagine it, Mamma! And the music was quite thrilling and magnificent. He's a genius, that Polish boy. And, Mamma, you ought to have seen Prunella. Stirred doesn't describe her! Prunella, of all people!"

Two hours later, the full tide of the evening's agitation throbbed in her own soul, as she sat by the window in the moonlight, and leaned her hot cheek on her cool, bare arms. To the beat of Stefan's music she heard the newly intricate theme of her own life. Outside,

silent and misty, lay the dear garden and fields that were slipping away, unless she were going to save them. From across the hall came her mother's tired breathing. All around waited the conscious stillness of the old house. And in her heart burned her secret with its strange new bitterness. Was n't it in him to be earnest, to go to work seriously? As yet in his letters he had talked only of the joy of Paris, of the good times and the pretty models. And now there was this little Sicilienne who could make the omelets! She was to be his picture, the serious work that meant his beginning as an artist. He was painting her eating cherries in the window of the little studio against the plants and the birdcage. That is what Olivia Ladd's lover was doing in Paris! And here at home, what was she doing? There were the debts and the changes and — and the future! She instinctively shut her eyes in fear of it and buried her face in her arms. And to-morrow there were those cold-frames to make, and the men to engage for the fall ploughing. She welcomed the prosaic turn of her thought and rested a moment in it. Then, quite irrelevantly, with almost absurd inconsequence, there flashed before her mind's eye Patrick Joyce's firm hands

on the oars, and she heard his soft brogue as he said, "Faith, and it's what I never would do, take away the old places from those who love them."

Just about this time, Miss Hollins, in her big mahogany fourposter, woke suddenly at the sound of her own voice, saying, —

"I'll get you the hot-water bag, Prunella. And the papoid tablets are on the dresser. I knew that lobster was n't fresh."

"Oh, Aunt Lou, it is n't the lobster at all. You've been dreaming. I'm not sick. I'm just — just — just a baby," Prunella was sobbing, down among the pillows.

Miss Hollins drew her close and patted her white shoulder.

"Somehow — somehow that music got me all stirred up, Aunt Lou. Does music always, do you suppose? Always make you want something awfully that you can't get, and you don't know what it is?"

"Of course it does. That's what makes music so nice. But if you don't know what you want, how do you know that you are n't going to get it, sometime? That is the way I look at it, Prunella. Why, that night I heard Blind Tom I just could n't settle down. I remember

just as well as if it were yesterday. Mother thought I was crazy. But it seemed as if I could n't stay in bed, so I went downstairs and labeled jelly till morning. But you try — try to sleep, dear. Think of fields of gentian or lady-slipper or wild roses, and count as you pick. You 'll be asleep before you know it."

So Prunella obediently nestled her dark head on Miss Hollins's shoulder and seemingly gathered blossoms until she lost her way in deep fields of slumber.

Up at the old Hollins place, an hour after the automobile had whirled around under the maples and gone to bed in the wistaria-covered garage, Bride Joyce turned out the electric light and threw wide her curtains. She had read her New Testament and her á Kempis, and said her night prayers, and now the moonlight twinkled on her little crystal rosary as she sat on the window ledge and looked out over the moonlit lawn with the black tree shadows, to the full, ripe tobacco fields beyond. The air was sweetly rank with the fragrance of the dewy tobacco, and vibrant with the responses of katydids. So bright was the moon that Bride's clinging négligée lost little of its delicate pink, and her long braids but little of their brown as she leaned her head

against the window and let the beads slip slowly through her fingers.

When she had gone almost the twinkling round of the chaplet, the odor of a pipe and a step on the gravel below distracted her from angelical salutations. She leaned out and peered over the tangle of creeper around the sill. It was Patrick, still in his evening clothes. He came out and stood for a long moment looking off to where she had been looking, to the fields and the far hills in the silvery haze. Then he began to walk up and down, up and down, on the turf at the edge of the gravel.

"He 'll ruin his thin shoes in the wet," Bride was thinking. "And what 's come over him, at all, a great sleeper like him, without a nerve in him, that he 's not asleep in his bed, instead of moonin' out there like a lovesick gossoon. Faith, it 's of Aileen he 's dreamin'. And it would be better for him altogether if he 'd stop dreamin' of her, for it 's less and less she 'll be afther dreamin' of him, with her love like a feather that 's blown by every wee puff of wind."

Then she leaned out again through the creepers and called softly, "Pat, shall I come down? I 've no more sleep in me eyes than if it were broad noon."

He turned and came over under her window. "Yes, come down," he answered softly. "It's too beautiful to stay in. And it's not late. Hear! There's just twelve striking now in the village."

So she caught up the long white cape she had worn to the concert, and ran down to him. From her Uncle Mike's room there came the even resonance of healthy snores, quite regardless of the evening's music. In the smoking-room, under the lamp on the centre table, lay an open letter. Even in her quick passing, she could recognize Aileen's fine, pointed writing with the little black dashes.

"Y' see," she laughed as she joined him, "I'm in my thin slippers and I'll be afther doing no such foolish thing as walkin' in the wet grass like yourself."

"It was why I walked on the grass, that the gravel would waken y'," he said. "And I was just thinking the seat under the pine tree would be better than walking here in the dews."

As they went under the low, sweeping branches, a drowsy bird stirred softly above them, and they sat down in a fine spatterwork of light and darkness.

"Was it the coffee for supper or the music

that's kept y' out of y'r bed?" Bride asked, folding her cape around her. "The coffee was strong enough to lift y' bodily in the air, but it gladdened the heart, sure."

"Oh, I had n't thought of going to bed," he said lightly. "I was reading after you left, and then, when I went to lock the front door, it looked so cool and inviting out here. Y're the girl that ought to have been long ago in bed after doing enough work for ten the size of y'."

She gave a quick little sigh. "Oh, I could n't. The letter to-day from Sister Ursula would n't leave me — what she was after telling of the new shrine of St. John in the convent garden, and the children hangin' garlands around the neck of the lamb, and poor Katy Finn's dying and leaving a wee baby, and the altar linens they're bleachin' on the green by the brook. Faith, I know I'm that silly to be thinkin' of it, Pat. But it does seem that if I could just once take the linen all drippin' out of the brook, and spread it on the sweet grass, an' see the clouds come an' go over it an' — But it's wicked I am to be thinkin' of home when I have y' an' Uncle Mike. It's just after gettin' the letters that my heart is so soft. Y' know how it is, Pat."

"Oh, yes, I know how it is," he said with a long pull at his pipe, "But it 's not for shrines and for nuns that I 'm softhearted, sure. It 's to pull at the nets in the mists off Killery, and to bring down a red deer in Glen Inagh and — and to hear the pipes and — and see —" His pipe again had grown cold and a deal of puffing it took to get even a whiff of smoke.

"See Aileen dancin', shure," Bride added softly, "light as the leaf shadows there on the turf. There 's nowhere so light a dancer. Whatever would the people here have to say to such dancin'!"

The pipe was once more alive. "What would they, indeed! Or to the color in her cheeks and the ripple in her hair and the roguish eyes of her!" he said a little absently. Then, with a swift drop in his voice, "But it was not of her I was thinking when you called, Bride," he went on. "It was n't of myself and — and such things I was thinking. Faith, it was the eyes of that proud Miss Ladd that I've been seeing ever since the music to-night. Y' see, knowing the story as well as I do, I can read the trouble in them. And a man's heart aches to see a girl so unafraid when everything is so dead against her."

"Poor thing!" Bride exclaimed, warmly. "She's as beautiful and proud-looking as Lady de Lacy, that time I saw her at Benediction in the convent. But then it's worse for them that are proud, when they are unhappy, for there's no way for love to get in to warm the hearts of them. And if Mr. Welling were just a wee bit more — more like you, Pat, and Uncle Mike — with a little more of a head on him. If it had been y', on my word, y'd never have gone off and left her all — "

"Welling! Dacre Welling? That young fool!" he said quickly. "And what has he to do with Miss Ladd?"

"Why, always they have been lovers. Didn't y' know that, Pat? And didn't I tell y', that when I was over there for the Major, the morning of the funeral, she came bringing her arms full of flowers, and I saw them there in the yard, the two of them, and at once I knew."

"No, you didn't tell me," he said. "So that's the way of it, is it! And he's gone off to be a painter and left her to face things alone. And she'll be true to him. Y' can see it in the eyes of her."

"Sure, she'll be true to him if she's promised," Bride said. "I'd know that by the look

of her. An' it 's as good as bein' married to plight y'r troth. But then — sometimes — sometimes — " she stopped.

A whip-poor-will off towards Mount Toby mourned softly. A light cloud shadowed the moon.

" Sometimes what?" he asked, in a very low voice.

" Oh, it 's not what I ought t' be talkin' about — lovers an' such things. Always the nuns have been sayin' that such things are the secrets God kapes. But then, just with y', Pat. Why, sometimes — sometimes the other one is not true, and then — then — the true one does not have to be true. An' — an', Pat, — y'll forgive me f'r sayin' it, dear, but when my heart warns me f'r y', I must spake "— she reached out for his hand and got his warm clasp — " an' sometimes I fear that it 's Aileen 'll not be the thrue wan, with all the lads lovin' her an' y' so far, an' the gay heart of her! I pray God y'll not break y'r heart, dear. It 's what Sister Ursula 's just afther sayin'."

" No," he said, still in the same low tone, " no, I 'll not break me heart, dear." And her hand still lay in his warm clasp.

Out of a long stillness she spoke, as she got

up and drew her cape around her and leaned over to kiss him on his forehead and make a little sign of the cross there.

"You 'll be comin' in soon, Pat? I'm quite chilled with the dew. An' could n't y' somehow tell Miss Ladd that Uncle Mike has the heart of an Irish gentleman in him, an' that she need n't be sayin' a last good-bye to her garden when the frost comes? Can't ye tell her sort of easylike an' gay, Pat?"

"No, I can't tell her. I am the very last one that can tell her," he said. "Good-night, dear. If anyone could, you could."

"Good-night, dear. I 'll be thinkin' out the way. An' soon y'll be comin' t' bed? The house misses y' sittin' out here in the night." And she went away over the dewy grass.

But she had dreamed herself away to the old country, on the green by the convent brook, bleaching her linens for Patrick's wedding shirt, before the garden was left to the shadows and the moon.

CHAPTER XVI

COLD-FRAMES

"Sure an' it 's a lie, the very name of thim," old Timothy grumbled, between hammer-strokes. "It 's could-frames y' call thim, and God knows they 'll be could enough t' freeze annything that grows. But in me wee garden it was niver to freeze the things I was tryin'."

"But they 'll be warmer than the outside air, Timothy," Olivia explained amiably, marking measurements on the boards. Although her eyes were heavy after her wakeful night, her heart had regained some of its lightness in the fresh morning air out in the old south garden. "You see, it 's just to distinguish them from hot-beds, that are heated with manure, and these are n't heated at all. You will see when the young lettuces go in to-morrow, and then in a little while the spinach and the cabbage and the parsley."

Old Timothy had three nails in his toothless mouth and many more in the sagging pockets of his greasy blue overalls. He stopped and rubbed his sleeve over his red face with its bushy gray whiskers. "Well, thin, it 's the same as it

is with cratures. It 's often a warrum heart goes by a could name," he said. "But, my wur-rd! How it is y've come to know all y' say y' are afther knowin' about gyardens an' farrums whin y've niver raised as much as a burrd seed! An' it was only the other day y' were sailin' boats on the brook with the Welling b'y — an' now it 's to be a farmer y're tachin' me."

"But, then, you see, I 've grown up, Timothy, and I've just been to a college where they teach people to be farmers, and to raise things in the cheapest way to make the most money, and — "

"Thin it 's a millyunaire I 'd ought to be, God knows, if it 's doin' things chape that makes the money. All me life I 've been doin' things so chape that sometimes I niver did thim at all, and niver a pinny to show for it."

"And, besides, Timothy," Olivia went on abstractedly, reaching for a hammer and putting a nail daringly into place, "who is there to do it if I don't?"

"God love y', there 's no one, unless y'll let the ould place go to those dirty Polanders that 's fillin' the valley. The divil take thim! It 's thim that 's makin' the money be doin' things on the chape, ivery mother's son of thim a-straddlin' the — "

"Never! Never, Timothy!" Olivia cried, hammering her finger with sudden emphasis. "Oh, never, if I can move a finger to stop it." The pain made her a little faint and she sat down on the lumber pile in the shade of the currant bushes.

Swallows were darting around the eaves of the old barn. Ben, Dacre's setter, was barking at the cats sunning themselves just out of reach on the grape arbor. The snow of the clematis lay in fragrant drifts over the fence between the yard and the garden, and glimmered on the walls of the house among the trees. As snowy, the freshly washed dish towels fluttered on the line at the kitchen door. In the sunshiny stillness, old Timothy's hammer-strokes sounded sharp, and a cow bell in the high pasture like a tinkle in a dream.

"It's loike y'r father y'r spakin', God rest him, but it's not loike 'm y'r wurrkin', shure," the old man was rambling on. "Niver with his two hands around the place did I see —"

Olivia sprang up, wrapping her handkerchief around the bruised finger. Suddenly, the poignancy of it all lay bare before her.

"And, Timothy," she said briskly, "now you must tell me something. You know every-

body around here, don't you? And you see I've been away so much and Mamma goes around so little. I must have some men to work for me right away. We've got the ploughing to do in the fields where I'm going to put the winter rye, and in the spring, after the rye is ploughed under, the clover. And then there are the fields to plough right away for the turnips, and all the fertilizers to spread. And at the college they advise farmers to make their own combinations. Could you mix fertilizers, do you think, Timothy? On the turnip field, I'm going to put five cords of barnyard manure and one hundred and fifty pounds of muriate of potash per acre. And then, too, the insoluble —" She stopped and rubbed her eyes a moment and gave a little laugh. "Do you think you could get some men to work for me regularly, Timothy?"

Timothy had taken off his battered straw hat and again mopped his red face with his sleeve. "God love y', Miss, y'll be afther killin' y'rself with all that thinkin'. An' what does it all come to, afther all! Take it aisy, the ould farrum, loike y'r father did, an' I'll wurrk me two hands off f'r y'. Shure I will. Take it aisy, for God's sake."

"And you will get me some men for the ploughing?" Olivia said, a little tremblingly.

"Shure, there's niver a man to be had in the valley whin they're cuttin' tobaccy, an' it's next week they begin," he answered a little sulkily. "An' such wurrk as y'll be needin' I I can do f'r y' as I've been doin' these forty year, an' no one complainin'."

"Of course, of course, Timothy. But, then, you can't do two or three things at once. And surely you do know of some men to do what you don't want to be doing."

"Divil a wan do I know, but it's Mike Joyce 'd be tellin' y'. An', faith, y'll not be wantin' anny dirty Polanders around ye, an' Mike Joyce 'll give y' what's dacent. From the same county as meself he came in the ould counthry, did Mike Joyce."

"Mr. Joyce!" she said slowly, putting another nail in place with great deliberation. "Mr. Joyce would be likely to know, you think?"

"Shure, an' he's the only wan as would be loikely to know. My wurrd, but young Pat himself would be the very wan for y'r ploughing. He's a strappin' lad, an' his smile 'd warrum up y'r could-frames, it's that friendly."

Olivia's smile was not even perceptible. "I'll see," she said shortly.

And that afternoon she did see.

"But, Mamma, I've just got to have the men, if I am ever going to do anything. The really critical thing is this matter of beginning — of getting the poor, neglected fields into a cultivable condition after all these years," she was saying, as she put away the thin old silver spoons and forks in the deep sideboard drawer after dinner.

"It seems to me, dear, the really critical thing is for you not to undertake too much and wear yourself out. Just see how you have bruised your hand, doing a man's work. And in two weeks school will begin and that will be strain enough. And then, anyhow, it's too late to save —"

Olivia shut the drawer with a little snap. "You said, Mamma dear, that you wouldn't hold me back. I know I can do it. I've studied every inch of the land. And what's a bruised finger! In a year —"

There was a brittle crash. Mrs. Ladd had dropped one of the gold-rimmed teacups.

"Never mind," she said, stooping to pick up the pieces. "It's best to get rid of cracked

things, anyhow. Of course I won't hold you back. But I'm afraid of these old fields."

"I'm not! Our fields!" Olivia exclaimed. "I guess not, Mamma!"

And, indeed, she did not look afraid of fields or fortune when, two hours later, she went down the shady street to find the men for her ploughing. Wholly mistress of any sort of situation she appeared in her fresh white gown, with the gay college band on her hat. But under the letter for Dacre hidden in her blouse, her heart pounded quite wildly at the thought of whom she might, or might not, meet in the offices of the Honorable Selectmen of the village of Fernfield, where, two months before, she had taken such pleasure in telling the unvarnished truth. This time, things would be very different. She had no favor to ask. It was purely a matter of business. And should she meet Mr. Michael Joyce himself, it would make no difference whatever. She could feel her eyes harden at the very thought of how she would look at Mr. Michael Joyce, as she asked quite calmly about the men for the ploughing, and the cost of their hire. Mr. Joyce would understand that she understood very well what she was doing. And should it be Mr. Patrick Joyce,

why, then, even more brief and businesslike would she be. The boat-ride on Ashton Ponds had been, perhaps, a little mistake, after all. The interview would be quite impersonal. The only pity was her bruised thumb. But she could hold it shut in her hand around "Snyder's Soils and Fertilizers," which she was taking back to the library. Still, it was a pity, that one sign of inefficiency just when she was so sure of her efficiency.

However, when she reached the town hall, there seemed very little immediate danger of any sort of meeting with any sort of official, old or young. Even her quick footsteps in the empty corridor aroused no sign of life, and not even when she tapped most peremptorily at the ground-glass door of the Honorable Selectmen was there any response. So she stepped into the room, quite up to the big closed desk at which she had sat and written that odious application, before she perceived in an inner room, bent over another desk, and seemingly lost in the art of composition, the stalwart form of Mr. Patrick Joyce. All in a glance, after a woman's fashion, she saw before him an open letter of voluminous and strictly unbusinesslike appearance, at which he was intently gaz-

ing, his pen suspended over a closely written sheet, his head propped abstractedly on his hand.

"If you please," she said breathlessly and with a dash of haughty reproach. If he would be so inattentive in business hours!

He sprang to his feet and colored to the crimson of his tie.

"Miss Ladd, faith! It 's yourself and — and y' just in my thoughts!" He glanced down at the desk, at which she, too, had glanced. "That is, y' had just been in my thoughts." He had grown even more crimson, but the blush of a girl was rather nice on his clean-cut face, with its very honest eyes.

Olivia laughed. She felt tremendously at ease.

"I don't see why — or how," she said, not at all as she had expected to say what she had to say.

He pushed forward a chair. "Will you not be seated?" he said carefully. "It is the way it was, I was answering a" — he hesitated a moment and pushed the papers into a heap on the desk — "a resignation and — and explaining that — it was quite all right — that the place could — could perhaps be filled."

"Oh, I see," she said. "It must take an awful lot of time to write to them all."

He had grown a shade less rosy, and suddenly there came into his eyes a gleam of laughter.

"It does, indeed, take a long time — to make things quite clear. And sometimes young ladies will not understand. It is always their own way they 'll be wanting. But you will be seated?"

"Oh, it 's not at all necessary," she said coolly, at the same time feeling a little quickening of heartbeats at the look in his eyes. What was it that he was thinking of her that gave him so different a look, a little bit as if he were laughing at her, and at the same time as if he were sorry for himself? "I have come wholly on a matter of business, and I hoped to see your uncle about it. When will he be in?"

Joyce went to the desk and turned over the leaves of a gorgeous calendar chromoed with the many uses of Perkins's Perpetual Paint. Quite deliberately he ran his finger down a page, frowning a little in his perplexity.

"Oh, yes! Of course! To-day is Thursday. He 's due here in ten minutes, from Buxton. The third Thursday he 's always at his office in Buxton till three-thirty, and then he makes a

quick run back here, the way he 'll be ready to — to see people at four-thirty." He took out his watch as deliberately. "And now y' see, it 's four-twenty-one."

"Oh, I see. Then I 'll wait," she said, sitting down on the edge of the chair. "It 's about getting some men for my ploughing that I want to see your uncle. I 'm getting ready to put in my winter rye and my turnips, and of course — of course, I can't do the ploughing — as yet. I 'm going to, though, another year."

He leaned over the top of the high desk chair, facing her. "Of course," he said. "Why not?" But he was watching the proud tilt of her chin and the tender line of the lips under their haughty curl and the swift come and go of the delicate color as she said her proud words, or forgot to be proud and laughed as a girl would laugh. "You will be doing whatever you make up your mind that you will do," he added slowly. And he had found the bruised thumb hidden in the hand that held closed "Snyder's Fertilizers" and she knew that he had found it.

"I certainly will," she exclaimed with a little laugh, dropping her eyes.

"It was rather nice, the concert," he went on, following his own train of thought. "The

lad brings y' a glimpse of the island, sure, in his music."

"The island!" she asked. "What island?"

He drew himself up with a quick breath. "Oh, I was forgetting that y' don't know all our sayings in Ireland. And they're pretty sayings. And when there is very beautiful music, or a beautiful scene, or — or when two friends are together and are everything to each other, then we say that they see the whole of the island. It is a fairy island, with a wall of fire around it that moves round and round, and has an open door in it. And when sometimes the open door comes opposite y', then y' see the whole island and the beautiful trees and the flowers and the happy people in the lovely clothes, and y' can hear the music they are making. But it's not often that y' —"

A shrill siren whistled outside.

"There's Uncle Mike," he broke off abruptly. "You see I calculated pretty well."

Olivia had sprung up and moved nearer the door. "You certainly did," she said. "And it is just as well. I could n't have waited any longer." Her heart beat close under her soft lace collar, and the color flashed into her cheeks.

A quick step came down the corridor.

"Hello, Bill!" a voice called. The step paused. "Why don't you send the children over and let them eat their fill of peaches? Sure, it's rotting on the grass they are. And the tomatoes are waitin' for the little ones to come with their baskets and carry them home for cannin'. Faith, y're welcome to them, me b'y!" And the step came on accompanied by a little whistle.

"Are y' there, Pat?" called the round, hearty voice. "I know y're not lookin' f'r me to-day, but we finished the dale over at Whitby, an' we've ingaged the stame rollers at Ouldfield an'—" He was in the door, taking off his hat to wipe his hot, round face on his large and immaculate handkerchief, his linen dustcoat open over his blue serge and his immaculate white waistcoat.

"Faith, it's Miss Ladd, Uncle Mike," Patrick said quietly, with the little gleam again in his eyes.

Olivia stood very straight and faintly smiling. Mr. Joyce smiled broadly and held out his hand.

"Sure, I should have known Miss Ladd, in a minute, Pat, if y'd have given me toime. It's the unexpectedness of the mating, y' see. But it's very glad I am, Miss Ladd, indade."

Olivia gave him the tips of her white-gloved fingers. "I don't at all wonder, Mr. Joyce," she said formally. "It is rather unexpected — to me as well as to you. But I have come to see about some men for my ploughing. I shall need them regularly for some time, to get in my turnips and my winter rye. And — and my man Timothy tells me that you are the only one who can get them for me."

She rather enjoyed listening to her own nice enunciation, hearing herself put the matter into so brief and businesslike a statement.

Patrick had dropped out of the conversation. But she was quite aware of him as he stood at the desk folding the voluminous letter back into its envelope and putting it into his pocket.

Mr. Joyce had grown wholly formal and impersonal.

"I see! I see!" he said, feeling for the eyeglasses on their little black ribbon. "And will y' not be sated, Miss Ladd?"

"Oh, no, thank you, it is such a matter of a moment. It is too bad to trouble you when — when —" She hesitated and wished that Patrick had not turned and leaned again over the top of the desk chair.

"Sure, and it's no trouble, Miss Ladd. It's gladly I'll get y' the men. But it's good lads y' must have to wor-rk f'r y'. And about how many would y' be wantin'?" He was looking at her quite as she liked a business man to look at her — just as if she were also a business man; and her heart had now slowed down from its wild beating. Of course, he was thinking that it was for his interest to send her men that would do the work well.

"Oh, about three — or two —" she said. "You see, I've arranged to go shares on tobacco with Tony Wyzocki in all the river bottom lands and it's only for the upper fields that I need them. And if they could come right away — to-morrow, perhaps."

"Sure, they can. I'll have thim there bright and early. And I thank y' for comin'." Now he permitted himself a quiet, wholly deferential smile. "It will give me great pleasure to find thim f'r y'."

"Thank you very much! Good-afternoon!" She was turning to go, a little frightened at the sudden formality of their bows, and of Patrick's quite unnecessary holding open the already open door. Then she remembered just in time to save her reputation as a practical farmer.

"And the price?" she said, a little timidly, from the threshold.

"Of course! Y'll excuse me forgettin' to be businesslike," Mr. Joyce exclaimed apologetically. "It's well always to know, an' that's where y' show y're a manager, Miss Ladd. The price, in these busy times, will be — let me see, Pat! Can y' remember just what the lads get? I have it. Sivinty-five cints the day, Miss Ladd, an' they bringin' their dinner."

"Oh, thank you. That will be very satisfactory," she murmured, and made her trembling lips into a little smile and went away down the hall with light footsteps that to her seemed as loud and heavy as a giant's.

"The swatest angel that iver fell from Heaven f'r the sin of pride, Pat, me b'y!" Mr. Joyce exclaimed in a loud whisper when the quick footsteps had died away. "An' the innocince of her! We'll get the ploughing done for her in foine shape. It's Dinny Finn an' Jerry Toole we'll take from the potatoes an' send to her — with private instructions." He chuckled and rubbed his hands. "Faith, the child's thrying to save the ould place! I see the game of her! It's the loike of her that would comfort Bride whin she's missin' the ould counthry."

"But you 'll have to be that careful, Uncle Mike. She 's very fine and cold and — and different. And she 's almost ready to — to hate us! And if she did, it — it would be for always." Patrick was piling up the papers on the desk and closing it, and there was a little line between his level brows.

The older man had dropped into a chair and sat frowning a little, too, but rather whimsically and humorously, tapping his firm white teeth with his eyeglasses.

"Faith, it 's little y' know about gir-rls, Pat. She 's foine, as y' say, an' she 's different, but, my word! she 's not could. An' I know the story much better than y' do, an' I know what I 'm tellin' y'. The wor-rst of the hatin' is over, thank God! It 's the mother can hate. But this lass! She 's swate an' she 's strong an' she 's thrue, Pat. Lord, an' it 's a pretty game she 's playin' ould Joyce — and she 'll win, Pat, or I 'm a Yankee." And at intervals all the way home, in the motor car, Mr. Joyce chuckled at Olivia's little game.

It was the next morning that old Timothy, trudging to the village in the companionship of his stubby clay pipe and his old, old thoughts, was overtaken by a miracle. In his deafness,

he heard no warning of approaching wonders, and was as astonished as if Elijah's chariot had dropped down for him, when a shining motor-car slowed down into the grass beside him, and a young gentleman at the wheel called out gayly, —

"Good-day t' ye, Timothy, my man! The top of the mornin' t' ye! Will ye ride? I'll take y' anywhere y'll be going."

"Will I ride! Begorra, it 's jokin' me, y' are. Me wid me ould clothes an' me ould pipe! But it 'd be the joke on ye f'r me to ride wid ye, me b'y." And he stretched his toothless old mouth in delight and put his pipe in his pocket. "I was niver wance in one of thim things."

"Climb in! Climb in!" Patrick said encouragingly, helping him. "And now, where is it y're going this fine morning?"

Timothy settled himself back in the seat, gripping the sides firmly as the car swung out into the road and whirled off. "Sure, it 's to me regular job I 'm goin', at Mrs. Ladd's," he said. "It 's forty year I 've been worrukin' for her family, God love the poor lady! And now it 's the young lady that 's goin' to run the farrum, with her talk about ploughin' an' mixin' messes t' improve the sile, an' mashin' her thumb with

a tack-hammer an' a shingle nail. But she 's a plucky wan, an' God knows it 's in a bad way, is the ould place."

When the machine stopped at the Ladds' side gate, and old Timothy carefully alighted, Joyce tucked a dollar into his horny hand. "For tobacco and a new pipe," he said. "You 're all right, Timothy!"

As he spoke, he caught sight of a girl in a short khaki skirt just vanishing through the garden gate. Her sleeves were rolled high, and she bore a tray of young cabbage plants.

CHAPTER XVII

HOT-BEDS

Prunella had kept her Sunday-School class after the others, to finish telling them about the Thessalonians. There was still half a page of notes in her little brown notebook, when Mrs. Archibald and Mrs. Egerton and Miss Sarah Tibbetts let their children go. And Miss Sarah was always slow. But Prunella was sure she was justified in finishing the Thessalonians, even if little Elizabeth Chase had dropped her small, limp pocket handkerchief a dozen times, and Thomas Dickinson had yawned and stretched until his red necktie had wriggled quite around to his ear. It was a heavy, languid August day, and Prunella herself would have preferred the hammock to the Thessalonians.

When, however, she had fairly and thoroughly disposed of St. Paul's converts, and started down the meeting-house steps, she was rewarded for her efforts. Dr. Britton came along briskly behind her, and called out heartily, —

"Good-morning, Prunella! Your little folks so interested they kept you after school? That's a good sign, anyhow! I wish there were more like you." And he fell into her step and tucked his sermon book under his arm as he drew on his gray lisle gloves.

"Oh, no! It was the Thessalonians we had to finish. It seemed better not to stop in the middle of them." And Prunella lifted her best pink lawn carefully as they stepped into the dust of the wide, unpaved street.

All around them was the stillness of the hot Sabbath noon. Everything was quite deserted except for Dr. Barker's buggy and sleepy white horse hitched to Mrs. Clabby's gatepost. Mrs. Clabby was having her hay fever with a twinge of rheumatism. The only other sign of life was Solomon, her cat, jumping at grasshoppers in the long grass, by the road. On each side, the old street stretched off dreamfully towards the fields, where ripened onions bronzed in the thick sunshine, or tall, lush tobacco opened its pinkish bloom.

"I liked your sermon, Dr. Britton," Prunella was going on, picking her steps. "It was the helpful kind. I hate the — the fancy ones other people preach."

Dr. Britton laughed. "Thank you, Prunella. I'm glad I helped. But it was n't the preacher, after all. That text preaches itself."

"But somehow you made it just fit. I guess it's because it's what I'm always doing — judging people with a jump and then being spiteful. Aunt Lou says so." She was looking down, frowning a little under the brim of her rose-trimmed hat as she accused herself.

"I don't believe it, my dear! I know you as well as you know yourself — guess so, after marrying your father and mother and baptizing you and watching you grow, every inch of you."

She looked at him quite directly with her soft dark eyes as a child might have done.

"Oh, Dr. Britton, you don't know me since — since I've been grown up enough to — to understand. I'm always in a hurry and always — cross inside. And you used to talk to Olivia and me about sweetness and light. I don't have time."

He put his hand quickly and half caressingly on her pink muslin sleeve. "But, my dear, you are sweetness and light! I remember how I used to talk to you children. I was deep in Arnold. But I did n't see ahead into — into to-day. I did n't see the old homes gone — the

old church half empty — the — the invaders pouring in." His face had grown grave, and he finished with a sigh.

A faint, slow color came up from Prunella's little lace neckfrill.

"There!" she said quickly. "That's where I knew the sermon fitted me so pat. I've been so — so un-Christian about the — the new people. I've just loathed them all, Dr. Britton. And now I see. They are n't — are n't all as I thought." The faint color had reached Prunella's little ears.

Dr. Britton's chin had sunk thoughtfully into his crisp, snowy collar. "They are very wonderful, the new people," he said gravely. "I am convinced that in one way they are a — a chosen people. Not chosen as the Israelites were. Not chosen in that sense at all. But chosen to — to work out our destiny, Prunella. God knows how! I felt it very strongly — very, very strongly — at the concert the other night. It was quite remarkable."

Prunella said nothing, but her cheeks had caught the flush.

"What that young man did was quite tremendous, Prunella. He is a genius. God has called him to a wonderful career. And when he

held that strangely assorted crowd of people spellbound as he poured out the music of his own land — spellbound — and then stirred them all with an American national air — and then lifted them all into the 'Doxology' — it — it was immense, Prunella. You must have felt it, my dear!"

"I did, I think," she said faintly.

They had reached Miss Hollins's gate. Prunella paused.

"Oh, they're a wonderful people," Dr. Britton was going on. "But it's a great pity! A great pity. And he's a wonderful boy. I've heard his history, from the priest. He has noble — "

"Why, Dr. Britton! You're coming right in to dinner, aren't you?" Miss Hollins called out from under the clematis on the porch. "Roast lamb and peas, and a hearty welcome!"

"Prunella's peas?" he called back. "I wish I could!"

"No, not Prunella's peas this time. Prunella's garden's been all burned up by the dry weather. Now, do come, Dr. Britton." And Miss Hollins came down the steps with a fly-swatter in her hand, flourishing it cordially.

"Not to-day, thank you," he said, holding

his straw hat most gallantly in spite of the sun. "I have Deacon and Mrs. Archibald coming to dinner to try my own peas. But next Sunday, perhaps."

"Do, please!" Prunella smiled warmly. "And thank you so much!"

"What were you thanking Dr. Britton for?" Miss Hollins asked as they went into the house. "Dinner 's all ready. You 've been awfully slow. Was it about the post-office?"

"No, it was not about the post-office. I don't know what it was for, Aunt Lou. He was just — just nice, that 's all." And Prunella smoothed out her little silk gloves and rolled them into a neat ball. "I 'll cut the bread," she said, smiling a little dreamily.

That night at nine-thirty, when Prunella had finished stamping and tying up the mail to go out in the early morning, she sat down on a Sunshine soap-box and leaned her head back against the sacks of coffee piled on top of the flour barrels. The oil lamp in the bracket over her head filled her little corner with light, but threw long, strange, contorted shadows out into the store beyond the mailboxes. Over in the back where the cheese was kept, a mouse gnawed softly. Now and then a motor-horn went round

the corner in a long scream. The air was pungent with a mingling of coffee and cloves and dried apples.

Prunella gave a little sigh and closed her eyes. Ever since the concert she had stolen quiet moments and tried to recall "Yankee Doodle" and the "Doxology." That morning in church she had not sung for listening, to store away the tune in her mind. And now, as she listened for the melodies that would not come, she could hear only the thud of her own heart. But she could see much in these quiet times that was almost like music to her. She could see Stefan at the piano — his fine brown hands on the keys — his eyes, large and asking, looking towards her — the medal blazing on the lapel of the shabby coat. And now she could hear Dr. Britton's words: "He is a genius. God has called him to a wonderful career. . . . He 's a wonderful boy. I 've heard his history from the priest. He has noble — " Noble? Noble what? she wondered. A noble heart? A noble genius? But what a little fool she was! What was the matter with her anyhow! She had always said she loathed music and — and foreigners. And now!

She got up abruptly and turned out the lamp.

Then in the flicker of the dying flame she felt her way to the door and stood waiting for the light to snuff out. It was slow dying, shooting long gleams up into the cobwebbed ceiling among the suspended rakes and hoes and pitchforks and hams. Then blackness. Prunella stepped out into the light of stars.

It was not until she had locked the door and got used to the darkness that she saw a man sitting on the steps of the porch. Then she smelt a cigarette and saw one tossed out into the road. And it had not yet occurred to her to be afraid when the man got up and she saw that he held in his hand long sprays of flowers. In the dimness she could not see what flowers, but they looked like the sprays the angels had carried once in the Christmas tableaus at school. With the other hand the man was taking off his hat. It did not seem at all strange that it should be Stefan.

"You will forgif me zat I dare to come?" he said. "I bring zese for you — because zey seem you. And to spick wiz you I could no longer wait. Zat night? I mek you understan'?" And he put the flowers into the hand that went out to him.

Prunella held them to her face and got the

faint sweetness of gladioli. Her heart beat thick.

"Oh, yes! Yes!" she whispered, looking up at him through the dimness.

He gave a little laugh, a real boy's laugh. She had not known that he could laugh.

"Oh, an' you haf understan'?" he cried softly. "An' ze music? You like him?"

Prunella drew a long breath. "Oh, I loved it," she said. "It was the first time I had ever heard music." And then she realized herself and turned down the steps towards home.

"An' if I go little way wiz you, you let me?" he hesitated. "I come in and ask ze aunt. I not mind."

"Oh, no! Please. Don't ask Aunt Lou. But you — you may come."

And they went along under Mrs. Egerton's lilac bushes, that would lean over the fence. Across the street Mrs. Clabby's light went out. It seemed very dark except for the many stars.

"After ze music, it is ze only time to spick wiz you," he was going on rapidly, "in ze night — wiz stars 'n' ze sweetness. An' to tell you zat it is you zat meks ze music to me. Always, in my home I haf play, but it is you — you — ze music."

Prunella gave a little gasp. It was just like the time Aunt Lou had had that little bottle of champagne in the basket of fruit from the boarders.

"Oh, no! I'm not like that," she said. "I'm not a bit like that. If you could just see me when I'm peeling potatoes or — or weeding the garden, or cleaning the house. Then you — "

"Yes, yes, always I would! Of whatefer you do I mek ze music — ze music of ze home, of your hands — all is to me music, spifki, spifki!"

Prunella laid her gladioli against her hot cheek. They were almost at the gate. The house was dark except for Miss Hollins's candle.

"An' if I go way — to my home land, to study, I haf then no time to spick wiz you. Fazzer Zujewski he say God gif me music, but I say God gif it you to gif me. An' I haf much to tell of my fazzer an' my muzzer. I haf — "

Miss Hollins reached out and closed the shutters.

"Ssh!" Prunella whispered. "We 're waking people. Good-night!"

"But again may I see you?" he went on quickly. "I come an' tell all to ze aunt. An' if I go way — "

"Oh yes! Yes!" she murmured into the

gladioli, opening the gate. He caught her flower-filled hand, and, bending over it with the reverence of a worshiper, kissed it swiftly.

"God wiz you!" he whispered.

But she had already run from him up the path into the shadow of the clematis. As she turned the knob, Solomon Clabby sprang out of the hammock and whisked past her down the steps. Her face burned with a sense of guilt.

Miss Hollins sat up in bed with a jump. In the doorway appeared Prunella, very large-eyed and rosy, holding the long sprays of pale pink gladioli.

"Why, Prunella Loomis! What under the canopy is the matter? Shut the door, for heaven's sake. You look like a — a — "

"I know I do! I know I do, Aunt Lou! You need n't tell me so!" she whispered breathlessly, dropping on her knees at the side of the bed. "But it 's — it 's Stefan — after all."

CHAPTER XVIII

CEBULA

Mrs. Wieniaski trudged heavily along between the windrows in the wilted onion fields. Her heavy, rundown shoes, tied together by the strings, hung over her shoulder, and she planted her large, knobby feet flatly in the dust among the cool, limp leaves and the great white and bronze onions. She was bound for home, ahead of her there in the trees against the wild red afterglow, with the swallows darting black around the smokeless old chimneys. To the right and left, other weeders were diminishing in the evening distance, some towards the village back among the trees, others northward towards the hills, against which the stones in the Welling burial lot still showed rosily white from the sunset.

As Mrs. Wieniaski trudged, her thoughts went heavily. She was very tired, and, although her dinner-pail swung empty from her arm, faint and hungry. The hunks of bread and *Leberwurst* and the cold coffee that had made

the pail of some weight in the morning, had been more than shared with Wieniaski himself, and noon came early to those who began the day before the sun. But besides weariness and hunger, there was another burden upon Mrs. Wieniaski's spirit. It was an old, old thought that the abundant harvest always brought to her.

"All this to sell and no children to feed! All this to sell and no children to feed!" she was muttering to herself in her ugly, untutored Polish.

All day she had been raking the onions among the Krakoskis and the Brogodzds with their big brood of children. The plump, laughing little creatures had played around her rake, and, when she rested, little Sofia had climbed into her lap and gone to sleep. Again and again she had seen the mothers lift the kicking, crowing babies out of the baby carriages and suckle them, squatting in the meagre shade of a cotton umbrella or in the glare of the sun. And she had seen the smile on the face of a grandmother as she drew herself stiffly up from her raking and said, "There will be much money—much money for the little ones."

"All this to sell and no children to feed!"

For what, then, had they come to this big, new country, away from the old town on the Vistula, with the cheerful red roofs around the little church with the yellow dome, and the streets friendly with greetings? That is what again and again she was asking Wieniaski, and until a few months before, always he had said, "For Stefan. Stefan is Alexia's boy and his father was a prince. But he must work like the rest of us. He must make money. By gosh, I give him the chance and he make the money." And then, in a little while, he said, "By gosh! He is a big fool, that boy, to make music when he can make money." And then, ever since the concert, and since Father Zujewski had come all the way over the fields in the hot sunshine to talk to them about Stefan — ever since, Wieniaski had said, "The devil! He is Alexia's boy and his father was a prince. That is why. But he is the big fool, all the same. By gosh! I will give him the money to go. And then if he does well, very good. And then if he does not do well — the devil! he need not come back. I will feed no one that is too proud." And then she had said, "But, Wieniaski, it is a gift from God that he has. Father Zujewski has said so. And I myself, that night in the concert, he

made me to be at home again and to be young. And that is better than onions."

So she was remembering and pondering as she went through the ploughed-up garden, through the sagging garden gate under the bridal arch of fading clematis, into the growing dusk under the trees around the house. As if to catch up her thought, a wave of melancholy music flowed out to her as the wind came her way. Stefan was playing. He had forgotten to start her kitchen fire to fry the meat and the onions for supper.

She did not turn in at the kitchen door. Instead, she went softly around the house to the parlor windows and stood close in the syringa bushes, peeping in.

Through the threadbare lace curtains she could see Stefan at the piano, in the last radiance that fell through the western windows. It was the G Minor Nocturne that he was playing, but to Mrs. Wieniaski it was only music — music that transformed the idle, good-for-nothing Stefan into an angel as he sat there in the great bare old parlor, with a spray of gladiolus on the piano, and made her forget her heavy, tired feet and her empty heart. And to see him play! That was the music as well as what he played.

"I will go make the kitchen fire," she said to herself. "He must not make fires." And then, as she picked up her kindling in the woodshed, her thought went on beyond her. "And yet it is a fire that he makes when he plays! He makes the heart warm to be young again, to love, to hate, to not feel the emptiness. And now he will go. And he will do well. He will not come back."

When Wieniaski came into the kitchen with the boarders, Tony Somaski and Adam Ostroski and Leo Polenski, she looked up from the onions she was peeling and wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

"You wait. I was sick," she said. "Stefan has lighted the fire long ago and I have not come. I hurry."

CHAPTER XIX

FURROWS

Olivia stopped again to rest and straighten up her shoulders. Sowing turnip seed was not just like gymnasium work and indeed a good deal better, as she had assured her mother so confidently it was. The rows would not keep even, and the soil, thoroughly as Dinny and Jerry had ploughed and harrowed it with the horses they had rented so reasonably for her, was cloddy. But of course the old fields were in a sad state. Next year things would be very different. Dinny and Jerry had said, that very morning, that they had "niver sane the loikes o' the hate f'r the toime o' year. It was fit t' kill y'." And, then, if her shoes just would n't fill with soil and little pebbles!

Ben, however, was getting great enjoyment out of the turnip seeding. There were many husky young rabbits in the weeds along the stone wall, and a woodchuck hole down by the brook. So he frisked and ran and barked, and came back to encourage and smile a broad dog smile, and ran off on a new scent, and bur-

rowed in the bushes until only the quivering red plume of his tail betrayed his whereabouts.

Presently the sun went behind a cloud and a little wind fanned the western side of Olivia's hot face. Beyond the wall that the seeder was approaching, the aspens and birches and alders faced the east whitely. The west had grown a thunderous dark violet. Olivia looked up when she had reached the very end of the row, in a patch of low bittersweet, which was already yellowing on the wall. Again she rested, wiping her face and stretching her slender hands out of their cramp. To wear gloves as her mother had pleaded, she had scorned. Who had ever heard of a successful farmer that wore gloves! Then she climbed on the wall and sat with her hands clasped around her knees in the dark-blue denim short skirt. On the tip of the hills to the north the sun was beginning to shine again. Now the light was coming down the hills — now it was wanly over the village so white against the purple of the storm. And the men and women in the tobacco fields beyond the turnip field were still at work. In one field waved the tall, bare stalks of the stripped tent-tobacco topped with pink blooms. A long wain piled with the stripped leaves, and driven by a vividly

red-shirted man, was just turning out of the tent-tobacco field on its way to the great brown barn in the other field. In that field the whole stalk was to be cut, and beyond the slow wagon, there were more vivid figures hewing it down and straddling it on the racks to be hung in the barn. In the strange white sunlight, with that wild purplish sky off to the west, the scene had all the silence and remoteness of a picture. In the long perspective the movement counted for nothing. Then it darkened and the picture faded.

"If Dacre would only paint things like that — right here in the valley!" she said to herself, almost aloud. "It's great. And not always be trying to paint just women! If he only would!" And then she fell to thinking that perhaps he would when he came home, after the year or two of study — that he would paint her tobacco fields — that they would be his tobacco fields — that she should be his, and so, naturally, her tobacco fields would be his — and that, perhaps, sometime, they could buy Dacre's own old fields from the Wieniaskis, and then —

A blinding white flash zigzagged between her and the tobacco. The west grumbled. Ben

came in long leaps over the ploughing. She sprang down from the wall. The people in the tobacco fields were running to the farmhouse on the far edge of the fields, for them as near as the barn. A cool big drop splashed her cheek. She gathered up her bag of seed and picked up her seeder. For her it was the barn for shelter!

"Come, Ben!" she called breathlessly, running into another lurid flash. And then she sped on over the turnip rows into the gray sheet of rain that met her in the tobacco field, then on over the stubble of the newly cut plants into the dusky green depths of the barn.

For a moment its vastness and duskiness startled her. She and panting Ben seemed very small in the big doorway facing the dim heights hung with the rows of close-packed tobacco. Row behind row of velvety greenness up into untold depths of shadow; and row behind row lower down until it would have brushed her uplifted hand had she dared into it.

But she did not venture into it. Instead, she seated herself on a nailkeg close by the door, and got her breath, and looked out at the gray sheet of rain, and patted Ben into reassurance. Then she leaned over and drew off one of her brown half shoes and contemplated its interior.

A cloud of dust and small gravel fell out when she turned it upside down and shook it. Then, confident in her isolation, she drew off her brown stocking and shook it vigorously, too. Ben, with amiable hanging tongue, looked askance at the white foot. Then he pricked his ears together and looked out at the rain. But his shrill bark was too late. Into the doorway, round the corner of the barn, rushed another storm-driven human being. With him came a blinding flash and a quick thunderclap.

"Faith, it's not a minute too late I am!" he cried. Then he turned and saw Olivia.

She had gasped, risen to escape, given a little cry, and then sat down quickly on the ground, covering her bare foot with her skirt. Her shoe had bounded almost to Joyce's feet. Her stocking she clutched in her hand. She was as furiously red as he was white.

In another wild sweep of the rain and a crackling, splitting thunderclap, their voices, whatever they were saying to each other, were quite lost. Then she realized that he was turning to go. "Oh, please! Don't go! You'll be killed," she found herself calling very loud over the storm. "It would be reckless to go."

He was already out under the dripping of

the eaves. Ben had followed and stood sniffing his knickerbockers.

"Oh, I beg a thousand pardons of y'," he was saying. "Never once was I thinking to find y' here. It was the very last place in which I 'd be expecting to find y'!" And he started again out into the rain.

"Oh, please! Please!" she cried. "I 'm not silly. Please stay until it 's safe. And of course you did not expect to find me here." And then she began to laugh so merrily that to Joyce, standing there gingerly on the ragged edge of shelter, with his pounding heart, she seemed on the point of crying. "Of course you did not dream of finding me here," she repeated between laughs. "But you see—you see, I 've been planting turnips."

"I see," he said, almost crossly. "Doing work that is too hard for y' entirely. It 's cruel for y' to work like that."

She stopped laughing. Somehow it gave her a little pang to see him standing there against the rain. And he looked immensely well in his brown knickerbockers, with his clinging white shirt turned in around his brown throat, and his wide Panama from which little trickles descended into his neck.

"Suppose," she said, very calmly, "you just wait until I put on my shoe and stocking, and then you come quite inside — unless, that is, you — you prefer the rain." Her voice trembled a little between a laugh and a sob. "You see, Ben and I had just come, and I — I was getting the turnip field out of my shoes and stockings."

She saw, as she tugged at her stocking, a warm flush creeping up into the close-cut dark hair behind his ears. Why — why under heaven was she so sorry for him!

"Oh, no!" he said, with a little laugh. "I 'm not preferring the rain. I 'm as wet as a drowned rat. It was from the tobacco fields beyond there I was coming. I 've been helping the lads with the hauling."

"Have you — have you a — a button hook in your pocket?" she panted. "This shoe just won't button. I 'm awfully sorry to trouble you, but in the mud, you see, going home, it would never in the world stay on. It 's raining less, is n't it?"

He was fumbling in his pockets, the hand with the strange silver ring on it in the pocket towards her. He took his hands out empty.

"Not the sign of a one have I," he said. "But if you would let me — my fingers — It 's

often and often I've buttoned Bride's boots when she's been after wading in the brook."

Her heart gave a wild beat. Her mother's face flashed across the gray wall of rain. She remembered Dacre's fingers deft over her shoe buttons in the wading days of the long ago.

"If you please," she said gayly. "And then there's another nailkeg. And perhaps you will tell me one of your sister's stories."

He did not turn at once as she had expected him to do. Instead, it seemed to her that he drew himself up a little more proudly as he stood looking quite away from her out into the storm.

"I thank you," he said tensely, so low that she had to lean forward to catch his words above the wash of the rain. "But it is very slow I would be in turning t' y', if after I turn y'd be as — as y' have been to me. It's far — far better for me to be looking out at the rain than to see — to see the — curl on the lips of y'."

In the silence Ben stretched himself in the doorway with a sleepy whine. Outside, the wind was changing, driving the rain into the barn door.

"Please, please don't look at the rain any longer," she said gently. "And if you would

please button my shoe. See! Now the wind has changed for good!"

"For good?" he repeated. And then with a swift look at her that made her look as quickly away with a little laugh, he knelt, and holding the brown shoe lightly in the hand that wore the strange silver ring, he fastened the stubborn buttons.

"Oh, yes! For good," she answered lightly. "Soon we can go home. Thank you so much! A farmer should carry a bag full of all sorts of things for emergencies."

"And Dinny and Jerry are working well for y'?" he asked, quite prosaically, as he seated himself on the other nailkeg.

"Oh, yes! They are doing wonders. You see, they ploughed and harrowed the turnip field for me so that I could plant it before school begins. And now, to-day, they are in the rye fields. And then the planting I can't do, they 'll have to finish for me."

"And school begins when?" he asked. It was easy to ask questions when he was thinking of the wondrous change in the look of her as she met his eyes so frankly and kindly, and laughed so gayly, and sat there so simply before him in her coarse blue skirt and blue linen waist,

turned in, like his shirt, at the neck. "And you are glad to begin?" Even Aileen herself could be no more gracious and smiling.

"It begins this very next Monday," she was answering him. "I'm half scared, but then I remember By Smith and Apollonia!" And again she laughed, and snapped her finger and lured Ben to her side for a little stroking. "And now, will you not tell me one of your sister's stories? It seems to me it would be most romantic to sit here in this strange green gloom, with the rain so gray and wild, and hear one of those stories. If you would! And see! It's clearing a bit. I can see Sugarloaf there to the west."

"Oh, I'm no story-teller like Bride," he protested. "And then they break the very heart of y', the Irish stories. Somehow always the Irish do be having sad endings to their stories, the way it 's too sad to tell them. And the most beautiful of all is the saddest."

"Oh, do, please! I rather like to hear stories that are sad, because then I can say to myself that it's not true. And in one's own story —" She stopped. What she was saying began to sound sentimental.

"In one's own story one cannot always say

that the sorrow is not true," he finished quite simply. "Faith, that 's true enough, what you say. But then, sometimes, the very stories that we say are not true are afterwards our own stories. It 's what we never can tell — what will be our own stories."

She leaned forward on the nailkeg, stroking Ben's long red ear. The rain was lessening, and a faint rose flushed the gray. It was the sunset behind the storm.

"But the most beautiful story, which is so sad!" she begged. "Now I'm dying to hear it. And perhaps I may sometime find that it is my story. I should like to have a life like a folk-story."

"Perhaps," he said, looking at her quite directly. "I pray not. It is the story of Deirdre. She, too, was fair and comely and bright-haired, and heroes fought for her — but — It is what Lady Gregory says in her tales, far better than I can say it — 'In your fate, O beautiful child, are wounds, and ill-doings and shedding of blood. Many will be jealous of your face, O flame of beauty!'"

She sprang up with a laugh. "Oh, dear, no! That would not be endurable. But I do want to hear the story. And sometime — sometime

will you tell it to me? There 's the sun now — or the sunset."

"I will," he said. "The drops are like gold, are they not? It would be rather good fun to walk through them in the freshness."

Out of the gray the hills were shimmering clear against the clean blue sky. A meadow-lark's note dropped down out of the afterglow. The pools in the fields shone in gold and rose.

"Oh, see! See!" Olivia cried, looking back from the threshold into the duskiness.

And among the green hangings of tobacco fell long shafts of the sunset, touching up the brown of rafter and beam and shingle.

"It is splendid enough for Deirdre," Joyce said as he picked up the turnip seed and the seeder. And then they went out over the wet fields, over the swollen brook on the narrow log bridge, through the pasture with the shine of the west all over the dripping fern and blueberry, and into the Ladd stableyard, through the rotten old gate that was propped shut with a stone. And all the way they talked of tobacco cutting, and the cost of a tobacco barn, and the present price of onions, and the economy of keeping cows and pigs as a means of enriching the soil, and the proportion of K20 the river

fields required, and the correctness of first impressions, and the force of circumstances. And by that time they had reached the gate into the back yard, and there was Mrs. Ladd coming down the path towards them. She stopped quite still when she saw them and made no response to Olivia's little wave of the hand.

"Oh, Mamma! Were you frightened?" she called. "I 'm absolutely all right, but covered with mud. It was a glorious storm, was n't it!" It seemed to her that never had she seen her mother so white and slender and unapproachable. And her eyes were so bright and cold.

"This, Mamma, is Mr. Patrick Joyce," she went on recklessly. "He has quite saved my life, you see, — a sort of knight to the rescue, Mamma!" And she laughed a little, and looked at the knight.

And he was not unknightly as he bared his head and bowed very low to the cold, proud lady who had no hand to offer him in greeting. Even the turnip seed and the seeder in his left hand did not detract from his knightliness.

"I thank Mr. Joyce, then, for his knightly services to — to my distressingly democratic daughter," she said with the smallest of smiles. "He has been very kind."

He put down the turnip seed and the seeder. "If Miss Ladd had needed my good sword, it would have been at her service," he said gravely and slowly. It rejoiced Olivia that he gave no smallest trace of the brogue.

"But sword or seeder, the service is the same," she called lightly after him as he turned away.

"Now, do come and get dry clothes, Olivia. And there's a pot of tea and a letter there for you. Timothy went for the mail before the storm."

CHAPTER XX

LE BEAU VELLING

JUST about the time that Olivia and Patrick were tramping through muddy tobacco fields in the afterglow, it was midnight in Paris, and Dacre was writing a letter. Over the very same table on which Grazia served the omelets after the long poses, he was leaning, one hand in his tawny hair, which he wore a little longer since becoming a citizen of the Quartier, the other driving a villainous, rusty pen over big thin blue sheets. The bells of Saint-Sulpice had just struck twelve. From the Boul' Miche, five stories below, a scrap of "Funiculi Funicula" floated up and in through the wallflowers and the mignonette and the little cage where the fauvette was sound asleep dreaming of a cherry tree. Orloff was out, and would be till morning, at the ball of Le Singe Vert over in Montmartre. As yet, the balls were too French for Dacre, with twelve words for his vocabulary. Orloff said not to mind — that words were n't needed when a man had a faultless nose and the women called him "le beau Velling." And up to a certain

point le beau Velling had found his looks sufficient.

But in the matter of letters to a woman in a little town of old elms and gray old houses in a great land across the sea, looks were not all-sufficient. He had, to be sure, already sent her a little snapshot of himself in the studio under the big skylight. Orloff had taken it and given him two. One of them Grazia wore in a gold locket on her garter of cherry silk. The other had gone to Olivia, and was kept in a tiny silver frame hidden behind "Bulletin No. 68, Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station. Inspection of Commercial Fertilizers." That was an absolutely safe place. Mrs. Ladd could have no possible need to consult the Bulletin.

To-night, in the quiet studio, with only a sleeping fauvette for company, fancy could take easy flight, and Dacre was writing as easily as he would have talked had he been sitting with Olivia in the old war-room at home.

"My Darling," he had begun in the unformed, childish hand that he tried to make manly by scratching and scrawling into a fine illegibility, "I wonder if you are thinking of me and longing for me as I am for you to-night. I am all

alone in the studio, and somehow I can see you so vividly. You are perhaps sitting on the old stone bench in the clematis arbor. Do you remember your sixteenth birthday, in the clematis arbor? It was the first time I kissed you — and the last time until that day on the stile by the wall, that day Grandfather died. And so I am thinking of you now in the arbor while I sit up here alone.

"Orloff is a real sport. He takes in everything. To-night he's off at a ball in Montmartre, given by a club of Russian artists that call themselves 'Le Singe Vert.' I've been told by some fellows around at La Rose's, that his father is a Russian prince and his mother a Spanish dancer. He's painting for the fun of it, and he knows Paris, every inch of it. He's a good fellow to be with because you can't get taken in if he's around, and he's ten years older than I — calls me 'Sonny' and says the women call me, le beau Velling.

"You ask me where we take our meals. Oh, anywhere. There are jolly places all along the Boul' Miche, and the Boulevard Mont Parnasse, and in every quaint little side street where you'd least expect to find them. And then, when there are any models around, they are only too will-

ing to cook you an elegant mess of something or other with a queer French name and make you a salad fit for the gods. I told you about Grazia's omelets. And then we go to the Bois on picnics — Sunday picnics! Don't tell your mother. And we've been several times to Meudon and Saint-Cloud, as I wrote you. The models are a gay, careless lot — not at all your kind of women. But Grazia isn't like the others. She's a Sicilian, as you know, and they are different. Orloff found her on the Pont Alexandre one night, ready to jump in. She wouldn't tell why. But she is great for a study in color. I wrote you about painting her in the window eating cherries. I got tired of that. It was too trivial. Now I am doing her more seriously.

"Am I really getting into artist life, and accomplishing something? That's a funny question, dearest. You believe in me, don't you? Of course, I'm getting into it. And La Rose is very encouraging in his comments. He says I have it in me. And you know I have. Remember, too, that I've never lived until now. If I just had n't fooled away all those years trying to get into college! La Rose says an artist and a musician should begin in the cradle. But now I'm living! All the years before this, in

that rundown, shabby old house in the onion fields, are like a nightmare to me, except in the thought of you. And now I 'm going to live! And soon I 'll have you over here with me, and you will feel as I do about the old places and the dull life in an American village. I wish you were here this very minute, opposite me at this rickety little table, with the light shining on that lovely pale-gold head of yours and those dear frank eyes looking into mine. You would n't stay opposite me long, my own Sweetheart!

"And now I want you to do something for me, dear. See old Joyce and ask him if something cannot be realized on all that life insurance of Grandfather's that never came to anything. You see, he paid a big premium for years and years, and then, when money stopped coming in, he stopped paying. I see now that Grandfather was a mighty poor manager. Just see old Joyce and talk it over. Do it for me, darling. I'd do anything for you. And the sooner the better!

"Good-night — or rather, good-morning, dearest! The bells on Saint-Sulpice have struck one. Remember always how wholly I am yours.

"D. W."

When he had flourished his initials into a fanciful scrawl of hearts and love-knots, which took him a matter of a few moments, he put his letter into the envelope and addressed it with a fine attempt at dignity — "Miss Olivia Ladd, Fernfield, Mass., U. S. A. Via Cherbourg." And "Via Cherbourg" meant the afternoon of this very day, if it were to catch the fast steamer that it was imperative that it should catch. So he ran down the long flights of stairs, out into the half-deserted street that smelt so fresh from the wet asphalt. The café on the corner, where the post-box was, still showed its gay lights. When he had dropped in his letter, he went over to one of the little tables under the blooming oleanders and whistled to the waiter dozing in a corner.

"Un absinthe," he called with a finely careless pronunciation.

And by the time the little gray glass had been set before him, a girl in a scrap of bright green mousseline with her hair banded like a Madonna, had come over from another table and rested her chin in her palms opposite him. And it was not of coloring that Dacre was thinking as he looked deep into her shadowy eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MEETING OF THE WATERS

When this pleasant love-letter was in the fogs off the Banks, under a very seasick and dejected lot of millionaires and others, Olivia was within two days of beginning her professional career and Miss Hollins was planning her *coup d'état.*

While partaking of Mr. Michael Joyce's embarrassing superabundance of vegetables, Miss Hollins had been experiencing, not, perhaps, a change of heart, but certainly a readjustment of that organ. People with hearts never need a change. God knows, a real heart is too rare and too valuable and too beautiful for the owner ever to consider a change of it! And, truly, among the older and more steadfast generation of New Englanders there were, and are, many of these articles *de virtu.* It is only that a contracted area of experience has left them unfairly adjusted, and limited exercise has made them stiff and unmanageable. So no wonder it's hard for the owners to turn them quickly and warmly and understandingly toward these quite inconceivable and outlandish new conditions, and to

believe always that the invaders into the aristocratic old strongholds have organisms like unto their own!

It was then only a quiet readjustment that led Miss Hollins to say to Prunella, out of the fragrant fumes of the wild grape jelly that was purpling the sides of her preserving kettle, "But why should n't I have a tea-party, Prunella? Just three or four in for tea out of the Lowestoft china. It is a shame not to use that Lowestoft sometimes. You remember it is to be yours, Prunella, after I'm gone!"

"Oh, Aunt Lou! Don't talk about such things. I don't want the old china." Prunella was washing jelly glasses at the white sink, splashing in white soapsuds, and polishing on whiter towels just off the grass. "But how in the world could you stop at three?"

"I said 'or four,' Prunella. One or two more would n't count. Now, there would be Olivia, of course, and Mary Ladd, — don't believe she 'd come, — and Dr. Britton and Miss Kirk and — and Bride, and you and I 'd make seven, perhaps, and six sure. And just kisses and sponge cake and thin bread and butter and tea. And then, if there should be — be an extra at the last — "

"Not Mrs. Clabby, Aunt Lou! You know how you always smuggle Mrs. Clabby into your kindnesses because she's a widow. I don't see why in the world the Bible is always talking about doing for widows. That Mrs. Tracy that was here last summer was n't a very pathetic object. And the way she laid traps for Dr. Britton! To my mind that's where the Bible is n't revelation. And now, if you ask — "

"Dear me, Prunella, I've never given Jane Clabby a thought. And it is n't right to talk that way about the Bible. Perhaps there's a meaning there that you don't understand. Perhaps it's because widows have been so used to being waited on that it comes harder to stop. But I never thought of Jane Clabby. And would Thursday do?"

"I suppose so," Prunella said, not enthusiastically. Somehow since the night of the gladioli she had been even less willing to permit herself any playtime. The intervals between post-office and kitchen she had given to raking the grass vigorously and cleaning up the little garden, with her hat tied down close over her face and her hands in her heavy worsted gloves.

Miss Hollins had watched her from behind the shutters with a newly tender smile, drawing

her own conclusions. "For all the world like her father, proud and silent and — and obstinate, the dear! And now if I should oppose her — if I should try to talk her out of it when it's all as new as — as heaven to her! And that fiery, gifted fellow, with his flowers and his music and his mystery! Dr. Britton says it's like forest fires — that kind of thing after it gets started. And Dr. Britton knows Prunella, and he says it's safer to be nice to him, to let Prunella see just how awkward and queer he is, and — and that her own good sense will be the — the extinguisher. And then Mrs. Wieniaski in her bare feet — that will finish it."

"How can Olivia come anyhow?" Prunella was going on, ranging the shining glasses in rows with unnecessary regularity. "Her school begins Monday."

"Oh, she'll be home by five," Miss Hollins said cheerfully, skimming the jelly. "Five o'clock tea we'll say. I'll write the invitations first thing after dinner. I'll use those pretty cards you gave me last Christmas, Prunella."

"Write the cards!" Prunella exclaimed. "I can save you all that trouble. I'll tell the people when they come into the post-office to get their mail. They're sure to come, especially Olivia."

"Not Bride," Miss Hollins said, carefully inspecting the interior of the kettle.

"No, not Bride, but then Mr. Joyce will — or the chauffeur — or the young man."

"No, Prunella, I think I'll write the invitations. I've always wanted to use the pretty cards."

So after dinner, Miss Hollins polished her spectacles, and put a new pin-pointed pen into her pearl-handled holder that her father had given her when she was graduated from the Academy and read the essay on "Woman's Destiny," and got out a fresh piece of pink blotting-paper that had no reflected cash accounts on it, and set to work to inform the chosen few that she should be very glad to see them on Thursday for five o'clock tea. The one for Bride she blotted, and the address looked a little awry on the envelope. So that had to be rewritten with even more elaborate care.

It was not surprising that so delicate and beautiful a penmanship on Prunella's Christmas-gift cards should bring every one of the "six sure." The "seventh, perhaps," Mrs. Ladd, sent much love by Olivia, and a great bunch of hardy red and yellow and purple asters, which became very well the bearer's white gown; but

she herself was too tired to give herself the pleasure. "Lou" would understand.

Of the six, Dr. Britton came first, with a bunch of last roses, which went into a Lowestoft bowl in the sparkling and fragrant and appetizing midst of the tea-things on the old claw-footed mahogany table, around which were ranged with formal informality the fine old Chippendale chairs. On these very same chairs, Dr. Britton quite well remembered to have seen sitting gentle ladies and good men who had long since found a less upright resting-place under the periwinkle in the Fernfield God's Acre. And perhaps it was the thought of these absent gentlefolk that gave so bright a gleam to his eyes and so genial a warmth to his hand-clasp when Prunella met him on the porch, under the clematis, and bore away the roses, and Miss Hollins, in black china silk, received him under her father's portrait in the little drawing-room. Miss Kirk, with a pink cosmos in her white lace jabot, sat on the davenport near the hostess, and it was to her that Dr. Britton found himself transferred and talking of Prunella's prettiness and goodness, while Miss Hollins went to light the candles and Olivia came up the porch steps with her gay flowers, and Prunella

took her on in to see how pretty the tea-table looked.

But, though they were discussing the bloom of youth, Dr. Britton was thinking that never had he seen Miss Hollins with so youthful a bloom on her countenance as when she finished her illuminations, and went to the front door again and again, and upstairs to get a handkerchief she had forgotten, and out into the kitchen to see that the tea-kettle was really boiling and not just making believe.

It was while she was questioning the integrity of the tea-kettle that the shining motor car rolled close to her curbing and out of it a blossoming Birnam Wood seemed coming to Dunsinane. It was an airy, waving, pink and white Birnam Wood composed of long sprays of cosmos, and in the midst of it, with the assistance of a very smiling elderly gentleman in blue serge and a snowy waistcoat, there alighted a slender young lady in a very unstylish soft white mull gown. Her hat, with the tulle trimmings, was tipped a little to one side in a tangle of cosmos, and her cheeks were quite as pink and white as the flowers.

"Faith, Uncle Mike," she was saying, "I can carry them, and y' need n't throuble to send for

me. It will be only pleasant, the walk home through the fields."

"No, no! Sure we 'll come for y'," called the smiling gentleman. And then, when he had climbed into the car and had roused the young gentleman at the wheel, who was not the chauffeur, from his contemplation of the outside of the tea-party to which he was not invited, the car rolled away and the festivities began.

Miss Hollins had got back to her father's portrait by the time Bride had laid her cosmos in Prunella's arms, and taken Olivia's outstretched hand a little timidly, and advanced to the drawing-room door. But she left the ancestral background with cordial quickness and came forward with both hands in welcome when she saw the new arrival.

"We are very glad to see you, Bride," she said, holding her hand a moment. "Now we have the three Graces, have n't we, Dr. Britton — Bride and Olivia and Prunella? This is Miss Joyce, Dr. Britton."

"The Greeks were n't mathematicians in feminine matters," he said gallantly, shaking hands. "I've always been sure there were five Graces and —"

"And how many Fates, Dr. Britton?" Olivia

asked in the midst of the laughter. "I'd much rather be a Fate than a Grace. It's much more independent."

"I might have known you'd prefer that, Olivia. And you are, my dear! You are a Fate. Every woman is. That's her chief responsibility." He spoke lightly, but he was thinking how very truly and solemnly he meant what he was saying, as he looked at this very lovely and proud and high-spirited young woman whom he had known ever since she was an imperious baby.

"You're not if you don't want to be, Dr. Britton," Prunella said quickly. "Nobody can make you."

He laughed and shook his finger at her. "But you just are, Prunella. You have no choice in the matter, any more than you can choose whether you'll have curly dark hair or wavy gold."

"It's like the story of Deirdre, the way they hid her in the forest, and she to do no harm with her beauty," Bride said softly, with a faint deepening of color. "But the huntsman heard her singing and told the king, and she knowing nothing of the great wor-rld. It's no use, the hiding."

Olivia had colored, too, and come a little nearer. "It's very wonderful, your folk-lore, isn't it, Miss Joyce?" she began cordially. "And I heard you telling stories one night this summer on the meeting-house steps. The children seemed to love every word you said."

"Oh, but I love so to tell them, the way my brother says I'm never knowing when to stop. Always it has been what I love best, to tell the old tales to the little ones."

They were all moving into the dining-room, and presently Bride found herself sitting by Miss Ladd on the side with the cherry marmalade and the thin bread and butter, and Dr. Britton was coming up with the snowy little napkins and announcing himself the waiter engaged for the occasion, and Miss Hollins was pouring tea and vowing that he was the guest of honor. In and out of the fun and chatter, Bride was making her own reading of the proud yet tender face under the big white hat, all the while that she told of the children at home that she was missing, the way that she must know the little ones here, and of Leenane and the Killeries and the glens and moors and brooks that she and Patrick knew as well as Miss Ladd knew the main street in Fernfield. And as she

went on in her soft Gaelic inflection, drinking the tea that Miss Hollins had poured for her in the prettiest Lowestoft cup, Olivia too was making her reading, and urging on the charming talk that was so unlike any talk she ever had heard, with all her learning, and measuring and weighing, and prodding herself now and then with the remembrance of who the talker was, and then forgetting, and remembering the green glooms of the tobacco barn and a very proud young man standing in the doorway looking out at the rain.

"You and your brother are very great chums, aren't you?" she said, smiling. "It must be such solid comfort to have a big brother to stand between you and — and things." And she sipped the tea she had forgotten to drink.

"Sure, always we 've been. And always we 've done things together, Patrick and I — and Aileen, except the years he was away in the university. Then it was always of him and of what we would do when he was at home again, that Aileen and I were talking."

Olivia lifted her dark level brows. "Aileen!" she exclaimed. "And you have a sister, too?" She was a fortunate girl.

"Not a real sister, but as good as one, Aileen

is," Bride explained. "And such a beauty she is! Her picture has gone to the Duchess of Connaught, she 's that pretty — and that gay."

"Who 's 'that pretty and that gay'?" Dr. Britton broke in, offering the old Sheffield basket of kisses. "So many people are!"

"You are, Dr. Britton, waiting on us girls," Olivia laughed. "Now you sit down here and let me do my share." And she took the basket from him and threw her napkin over his arm. "And do get Miss Joyce to tell you some of the interesting things she 's been telling me."

And then she went over to tell Miss Kirk about the scarlet of the swamp maples down by the river, and the bird-notes she had recognized when she was planting turnips. And Miss Hollins and Prunella came up to hear about school, and Miss Kirk said that she wished there could be a concert every week by that strangely gifted boy, and Prunella colored and got up to pour hot water into the hot-water jug and began to pour it into the cream pitcher. And then Dr. Britton asked her how her vegetables were growing, and drew up a chair for her next to Bride. It was fortunate for Prunella that just here Miss Kirk's tremulous voice broke into the chatter with a question.

"Will not Miss Joyce sing for us, Miss Hollins? Somehow I know that she can sing — perhaps 'The Meeting of the Waters' and 'By Bendimere's Stream,' if she would!"

"Oh, it is like the chirp of a wren, my singing," Bride laughed. "But very gladly will I try."

So Dr. Britton carried the candles into the drawing-room and opened the old square piano, and Bride took off her hat and sat down on the lyre Miss Hollins's mother had embroidered on the piano-stool when she was at Maplewood Seminary.

Olivia, in the window seat, leaned back in the twilight freshness that moved the old lace curtains. She, too, was experiencing her readjustment, as she saw the soft light on Bride's hair, her slender hands on the yellow keys, her round white throat with its little gold medal on the fine chain. And then presently Bride sang, in the tenderest little contralto, —

"Oh, there 's not in this world a valley so sweet,
As the vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet."

And after Miss Kirk's two, Dr. Britton asked for many, and Miss Hollins said that her mother used to sing "Oft in the Stilly Night," "The

Minstrel Boy," and "Believe me if all those Endearing Young Charms," and did Bride know them? And Bride did and on she sang, and the candles began to sputter, and the stars came out, and Prunella heard a man's step on the porch.

Afterwards, when Olivia was smoothing down her feathers, disordered from the swift ride home in the Joyce's motor-car, she said gayly, "Why, Mamma, it was positively brilliant. You ought to have seen Miss Hollins when the motor-car came for Miss Joyce, and Mr. Michael Joyce rang the bell. You ought to have seen how calmly, and how serenely, she asked him in and introduced him to Miss Kirk and Prunella and me. I knew him, of course, from the other day; and Dr. Britton and he shook hands as if they had been old friends. And that Miss Joyce is a dream, Mamma. No matter how you feel you can't deny it. And her songs! And somehow, she 's so absolutely simple you can't question her breeding. It's just as it is with plate-glass, you know — you can't see the glass. Positively, I feel as if I 'd been juggled. I wonder what made Miss Hollins do it, Mamma."

Mrs. Ladd was toasting bread over an open stove hole. She held her thin hand between her face and the fire.

"Because — because it 's Lou's idea of being a Christian," she said. "She 's doing just what the Bible says, I suppose. But, then, dear as she is, Lou Hollins never did have any social sense."

And Lou Hollins, snuffing the candles and nibbling the crumbs of kisses in the bottom of the Sheffield basket, declared, "Well, now my conscience is easy, Prunella. And Miss Kirk did have such a good time. And Olivia was perfectly charming, was n't she! And the songs! Was anything ever sweeter! Somehow" — and Miss Hollins laughed, as she always did when she was going to say anything especially intimate and tender — "somehow, Prunella, it did seem as if Mother would have been very glad to have Bride playing on her piano and sitting on that stool. Dr. Britton said he thought so. And did n't he have the best time with you girls!"

Prunella yawned. "Oh, he 's a dear!" she said. "Why, Aunt Lou, you 've forgotten your apron — and with your best dress! But I don't see why the Irish are getting all the attention."

And perhaps the Irish were getting more than their share of attention. At any rate, Fate was concentrating upon certain Irish destinies.

It was that night, very late, that Bride woke from her home dreams upon hearing the auto-

mobile whirl round the house. She awoke enough to say to herself, "Thank God, he's back safe. I did n't like the look of him at supper. An' away all this long evenin'." And then she drifted back to a rocking boat on Killery Bay, and had had a day's fishing when Patrick opened her door and came in.

"Bride," he said, very softly, sitting on the side of her bed. He smelt of fresh air and the hand he clasped around hers was as cold as if he had been in the very bow of the rocking boat of her dreams.

"Yes, Pat! What is it?" she said quickly. "It's not sick y' are, dear?"

"Oh, no, no!" he whispered on quickly. "I'm all right — only I had t' tell y'. I've been all over the mountains thinkin' it out how t' tell y'." And he put his other cold hand around hers. "It's just as y' said, dear, the night in the garden. Sometimes — sometimes it's the other one that's not true. An' the other one, Bride, is little Aileen. Brian Desmond's the lad, God bless her."

"The little cruel cat!" Bride hissed savagely, sitting up with a jump. "But it'll not break the heart of y', darlin'!" And her arms went round his neck.

"No, indeed, it 'll not break the heart of me, dear!" he said tenderly, "with y' f'r a sister. An' this new country — 't would be a strange land for Aileen."

When he had gone as quickly and quietly as he had come, she sailed no more in a rocking boat on Killery.

"The little cruel cat!" she kept whispering to herself, until she quite irrelevantly thought of the pink and white Lowestoft cup at Miss Hollins's tea-party that day, and of Olivia's eyes under the big white hat.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BLUE OF THE GENTIAN

By and Apollonia were eating their dinner together under the old rock maples in the schoolyard. Now and then a yellow leaf fluttered down on Apollonia's sleek black hair, braided in the thick plait with the red calico bow, or on By's sturdy little shoulders in the shabby grey sweater; and once a bunch of leaves, like a handful of gold, fell right into his open dinner-pail with the three doughnuts in the bottom. There was a deep significance in the number of the doughnuts. By had thought of it many times since surreptitiously making a trilogy of the two that his mother had thought enough for his consumption. Two were for Apollonia —one for himself.

Two for Apollonia and one for himself was exactly indicative of the state of his feelings ever since the opening of school four days before. He and Apollonia had become one in their championship of the new teacher, and it was the opportunity to talk her over with breathless delight, between bites, that had made them pool

their dinner-pails. Besides, there was the sympathy that grew out of the sense of being the teacher's mainstay and support in the running of the school: By, the water-carrier, fire-tender, clock-winder, floor-sweeper; Apollonia, desk-duster, flower-arranger, book-distributor, and hovering angel to the little ones over their primers and with their coats and hats.

"Ain't her hands nice!" said Apollonia, swallowing a chunk of sausage hurriedly. "But she ain't got no rings."

"Shucks! She ain't the kind that wears rings," By exclaimed scornfully. "She can plant turnips and rye just like a man, she can. I saw her. And she ain't proud."

"She 's the proud kind, but she ain't," Apollonia discriminated. "I could kiss her — her foot."

"I could n't. That's silly. But you bet she ain't proud. Why, the other day she came t' our house t' buy hens. Yes, she did. An' she carried two of 'em tied together by the feet, all the way home. My mother said t' let me, but she laughed an' said she liked to."

"I don't like t' carry hens," commented Apollonia slowly, "wizout shoes and stockings. Zey pick y'." She was munching the first

doughnut and wondering about the fate of the third.

"But she had shoes and stockings, of course," By said, a little condescendingly. "An' that's your doughnut, Apollonia. Sure it is. One's all I want. And — and I brought that for you."

"Did y'? My muzzer, I wish she can make these cakes."

"Shucks! My mother can make 'em lots better than these. These aren't much. She can make dandies with raisins in 'em an' frostin' on top. An,' Apollonia, say! I'll tell y' somethin' if y' won't tell nobody, — not even Marinska and Sofia. It's a secret — you know."

Apollonia looked at him with her solemn black eyes.

"Not much I tell zat Marinska," she said. "She tell lies. She say Teacher haf not enough fat."

By could not wait for further oaths of secrecy.

"That feller that has the big dandy automobile, I know him. An' he goes fishin' with me. An' he gave me a dollar — on the quiet, y' know, — an' he said to be good to the Teacher — that it's right."

Apollonia swallowed the last of the last

doughnut hurriedly. "An' Fazzer Zujewski, also he say to mind ze Teacher an' spick nice. But he ain't gave me a dollar."

"He ain't got any, that's why. But my fel—"

The school-bell jangled. Olivia stood on the steps in her dull blue linen. There was a wild sun-flower in her belt, the offering of the false Marinska. Tony Kwiatkowski had relieved her of the arduous task of bell-ringing, and it was just as well, for Adam Wyszatchi, in a checked blue gingham apron, held her right hand, and Basia, his older sister, aged five, fervently clasped her left.

And presently she was standing at her flower-trimmed desk on the platform, with the background of the picture of Washington draped in the Stars and Stripes, and facing the picture of Lincoln in the garland of bittersweet that By and Apollonia had made for it. On each side of Lincoln, a window made as inspiring a picture, with the landscape of onion fields and tobacco fields and stacked corn and red barns, and beyond, the yellowing hills in the September haze. Through the side windows that looked towards the west, flickering yellowish beams fell in through the maples, and played over the

desks and the brown and black and blond heads of the children.

"Copybooks, please," the teacher said in her brisk voice that made work seem such a pleasant affair.

And then Apollonia sprang up and went among the rows with the pile of writing-books, and nodded knowingly to By as she gave him his. And Olivia went to the board on the wall between the western windows and, in the flicker of the maple leaves, stood writing carefully and symmetrically and plumply, "CAT" in characters that she failed to recognize as her own. Not even Dacre Welling, in all the letters that were tucked into the various pockets of his various coats in the studio in Paris, could have found characters that at all resembled the ones Olivia had so carefully put upon the board, nor the ones that she proceeded, with a fine ear for phonetics, to put under them: "Mat, Rat, Sat, Bat, Hat, Tat, Vat."

"Say them over with me, children, carefully," she smiled, "and then write them while we count the strokes."

"Cat, Mat, Rat, Sat, Bat, Hat, Tat, Vat," chanted the children.

By's hand flew wildly up into the air.

"What is it, Byron?" Olivia asked approvingly. She was encouraging a judicious freedom of speech.

"And Pat?" said By valiantly.

Olivia colored quickly. "That," she said didactically, "that is only a proper name. Take your pens, children. One — two — three — "

And in an obedient moment, the heads were all bent over the books and the brown little hands were rounding the curves, leaving Teacher to meet no eyes more curious than those of the patriots on the wall.

And so the afternoon went on, the golden flicker dropping ever lower and lower in the maples. Olivia hardly felt the minutes go, so much was she already a part of her new work. That she "adored it" she had written Betty Preston the very first night she had been a teacher. And it was little wonder that she loved it, when she herself found so much love awaiting her. For the first time in all her highly trained and skillfully developed life, she felt the impulse to write a poem, as she looked down into the limpid, smiling eyes of the children and realized the little souls looking out at her. And it was "a lyrical experience," as she told Betty, when she felt their arms around her skirts,

clinging to her, and their small, trusting hands in hers. And then the young gallantry and loyalty of the bigger boys, By and his fellows of ten and twelve! Surely in such tribute a woman got a breath of Arthurian chivalry! So she wrote to Betty, her college chum, who was trying a similar, and yet very dissimilar, experience in a Young Ladies' Preparatory and Finishing School in Philadelphia. But to Dacre she poured forth no such enthusiasms. He would only smile skeptically at her sentiment, and besides, somehow, — although just how and why she could not explain even to herself, — she did not care to have Dacre feel that she was finding her winter's work and responsibility any too easy or too pleasant.

It was perhaps half an hour after she had dismissed her reluctant classes, staying, herself, to prepare the work for the first period on the following Monday, that By and Apollonia were loitering along the Fernfield road, munching apples that grew on By's secret tree, and keeping their eyes open for the blue patches in the low, sunny fields that meant gentians. Just as they returned empty-handed from a wild run into a patch of low-growing asters, which masquerade, sometimes, as gentians, a motor-

horn shrieked out ahead of them and a cloud of dust whirled around a bend. Apollonia scuttled back to the wall and climbed up.

"It's him! I bet it's him!" screamed By. "That's his horn. I know it every time." And he stood in the butter and eggs by the roadside and waved his arms delightedly.

The machine slowed down at his very toes, and out of the dust there emerged the smiling face of Mr. Patrick Joyce under a brown leather cap that to By seemed as royal a thing as an imperial crown. Apollonia put one leg, in its wrinkled white cotton stocking, over on Mr. Joyce's side of the wall.

"Want a ride?" called Mr. Joyce gayly. "Plenty of room, you see."

"You bet!" By cried, beginning to climb in over the door.

"But your friend! Faith, y're not a very gallant chap t' leave her behind."

"Oh, come on, Apollonia!" By said nonchalantly. "I forgot. Hurry up an' get in."

So Apollonia put the other leg nimbly on the right side of the wall, and picking up her school-bag and dinner-pail, as well as By's, scuttled down to the car and climbed in.

"Both of y' in the back, please," said Mr.

Joyce, giving her a lift over the door. "It's easier, the ridin', for little people like you. And now I'm going to take a little run up beyond the schoolhouse to see whether Mr. Wojnarowski has got in all his tobacco, and then we'll go home."

So he gave a grand turn to the wheel, and Apollonia clutched the seat with one hand and By with the other, and in a flash they were right back at school, slowing down a bit, perhaps, and they could see Miss Ladd quite plainly just in the act of locking the door. The two in the back gave her a wild shriek of greeting, but it was lost in the increase of speed with which Mr. Joyce flew on beyond the schoolhouse and up the hill and down over the bridge and round by the North Fernfield meeting-house and past Mr. Zashetzky's and Mr. Zoszczezynsky's. He was all off the road to Mr. Wojnarowski's, and By tried to tell him so, but it was no use. He and Apollonia were rattling round like peas in a pod and the horn was tooting at the Polish children and the Polish chickens that ran into the road. And then, before he knew it, Mr. Joyce had made a swift, wide turn, and, lo and behold, they were back at the schoolhouse, slowing up just enough for

By to see that the shades were all down and the place quite deserted.

"Gee!" Apollonia gasped, brushing the hair out of her eyes. "If I ever!" And then gasped again in terror lest Mr. Joyce run down and over Miss Ladd, who was going along in a leisurely fashion right in the middle of the road ahead of them.

But such a catastrophe was averted, and instead, the two in the back were beaming audience for the little comedy — Mr. Joyce out in the road in a jiffy with his cap in his hand, explaining that he had just been up to take a look at Mr. Wojnarowski's onion fields and that he had already picked up a part of Miss Ladd's educational establishment and would n't she now permit the other part to be picked up? And then Teacher, pink and queer as she had never yet appeared in the school, and hesitating as they had never seen her hesitate, and then finally helped in as if she had been made of sugar like the dogs and cats in the Christmas stockings; and then a brave turn of the wheel and they were off again, Mr. Joyce looking very straight ahead and Teacher's hat in her lap and her bright hair blowing back from the face that she turned towards him.

When they got to Fernfield Four Corners, where they should have gone to the right, they went quite to the left, and presently they were flying along towards the very hills that had been off in the haze all afternoon. To the two in the back, the swift approach of the hills was quite as much of a miracle as if they had marched majestically down to the Fernfield street; and the marvel of it all was so great that they had no eyes for the flushed face that Mr. Joyce turned to Miss Ladd, with a little laugh and something about "Aileen, ever since I was born," nor for Miss Ladd's smile and her, "the beauty of friendships like that." And when they had climbed so high in the hills that the Fernfield meeting-house spire looked as small as the hand on a watch, and they came upon a high, sunny field that was as blue with gentians as the sky over their heads, it seemed to By and Apollonia that it was all just part of the fairy story that the Teacher had begun to tell them at recess the day that it rained.

"Suppose we all get out and pick those pretty blue flowers for Miss Ladd," said Mr. Joyce, when they had slowed down a little at the roadside, under a scarlet maple.

"Suppose we do!" laughed Miss Ladd.

"And I will take a big bunch to Miss Kirk at Miss Hollins's. Have you ever heard of Miss Kirk, the blind lady who has lived with Miss Hollins ever since she began to take boarders?"

Mr. Joyce had n't heard of Miss Kirk, although he had seen Miss Loomis, the night of the concert, leading some one with a pathetic face, who seemed blind. And during the concert he had looked several times at her. It was a most interesting face. And it was of Miss Kirk that they were still talking when By and Apollonia saw much bluer gentians a little farther down in the field and ran to get them. But when they came back, with the blue flowers bunched quite up to their rosy cheeks, Miss Ladd was talking of Paris and of a friend she had there, and of how, before she went to college, she and her friend had ridden all over those hills. It was from her friend that Miss Ladd had learned of that wonderful field where they were picking, and once he had made a little picture of it for her. And Mr. Joyce had then said that he would give much for a picture of it that day, and then they had all got back into the machine and away they had been whirled down the valley road, leaving behind them a beautiful cloud

of dust, and workers in the onion fields shading their eyes from the lowering sun with their brown, hard hands, to gaze after the rich folk that had nothing to do.

When they again arrived at Fernfield Four Corners, which is just half a mile from the middle of Fernfield proper, the machine stopped and Mr. Joyce again alighted, while Miss Ladd explained, in most conventional tones, that a little walk would do her lots of good after sitting still all day in school, and that she wanted to stop at the post-office anyhow, and Mr. Joyce said that he understood perfectly. All the time, By was wondering at Miss Ladd's unreasonableness; for could she not take her walk after the end of the ride, and could she not go to the post-office just as well in the automobile? Indeed, it seemed to By that nothing could be much nicer than to whirl up to the post-office in that splendid vehicle. But neither Miss Ladd nor Mr. Joyce seemed to think that the post-office could be reached so successfully by machine as on foot. So By found himself face to face with a painful alternative when Miss Ladd turned and said,—

"By, will you and Apollonia walk home with me? We are so much obliged to Mr. Joyce,

are n't we? It has been a lovely ride, has n't it?"

"I will," Apollonia said promptly, climbing out over the door.

By caught Mr. Joyce's eye and remembered the dollar.

"So will I," he added.

And then there was a gathering-up of books and dinner-pails and gentians, and Mr. Joyce was given a bunch for his sister, and then By and Apollonia and Miss Ladd seemed to be going very slowly along the state road, and Mr. Joyce was just a speck in the distance.

"Give those to Miss Kirk and your aunt for me, please, Prunella," Olivia said presently, poking a bunch of gentians through Prunella's little window. "What a good time we had at your party!" Then very carelessly, "Any letters in our box?"

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" Prunella cried. "Where on earth did you get such big ones?"

"Oh, that's what comes of being a successful teacher!" Olivia laughed. "Floral offerings all the time. By and Apollonia picked them for me."

"Aunt Lou and Miss Kirk will be delighted," Prunella said with a gentleness that was new to

her. "We had a nice time, too, at the party. Were n't the songs beautiful! Yes, here 's a letter for you, Olivia, and a lot of bulb catalogues." And she handed out Burpee and Farquhar and Vick and, in their midst, a letter with a Paris postmark.

CHAPTER XXIII

HONEY FOR MADEMOISELLE PRUNELLE

In such matters, my dear Miss Lou, it is sometimes necessary to — to deviate a little from the truth. Not to lie, you understand. But to — to prevaricate, perhaps. The very derivation of that word explains my meaning: 'prævaricari, to stretch wide apart, to — to walk not quite — quite straight.' And in so delicate a thing as a love-affair — and when it is Prunella who is concerned! And of course she has an inheritance, my dear Miss Lou. Not from her mother's side, God knows! But there 's that little streak of — of Loomis stubbornness to look out for. And then when we consider that he is Slavic — pure Slavic, I confess — "

It was so that Dr. Britton had expressed himself that very morning when Miss Hollins had met him on the street and told him that Prunella had n't slept a wink the night before and that she could n't be persuaded to take hypophosphites and drink milk.

"She 's never still a minute, Dr. Britton — just as nervous as a witch. And she won't talk

about it. And so I just thought I'd take matters into my own hands — I've had to do it before in my life. And I have just about decided to go and call on that Polish priest and find out the truth about the boy. The priest seems quite sensible — but then, of course, I've never talked to a priest. And then how to keep it from Prunella. That's what I meant, Dr. Britton, when I asked if I should be justified in — in not confining myself to — to the truth if Prunella should ask me where I am going."

It was then that Dr. Britton had made his nice little discrimination and had derived his Latin verb. A Greek or Latin root was to him a deciding point. And so, fortified with etymology as well as with theology, Miss Hollins deliberately told Prunella that she was going to see Mary Ladd and sallied forth to see Father Zujewski. It made her conscience a little easier to go the long way round by Mary Ladd's and run in a minute to leave a sponge cake and tell her how beautiful Olivia had been at the tea-party, and hope that some day very soon they could have a long day's visit together. But it had not increased her peace of mind for Mary to declare that times were too radically changed for old friends ever to meet in the same old

way, and that, for herself, she never dared look ahead. Olivia was doing all the looking ahead and the planning and she was quite out of the running. Mary's thin white hands with the worn gold thimble, darning thin old napkins out of the very same workbasket she had carred to sewing society when she was a girl, with the same tomato pincushion and the same heart-shaped emery and the same brown morocco spool-case — those hands were disturbing enough to Miss Hollins in their pathos without her twinge of conscience when Mrs. Ladd said, in parting, —

"Why can't you sit longer now, Lou? I'm all alone. Olivia's days in school leave me much alone. Where are you bound for in this direction, anyhow?" And then a flicker of Mrs. Ladd's youth brushed her lips in a faint smile. "The only places beyond here belong to unmarried men — Dr. Britton and that Polish priest. It does n't look well, Lou."

Miss Hollins matched the youthful smile in her quick color. "But you see, Mary, if you 're in the cake business and eggs are scarce, you never know where you may have to go. And I just must have at least two dozen to-day." That was certainly not a lie. She must have the two dozen before night, and she was n't sure Pru-

nella could get them. "Good-bye, Mary! I'm going to set the day for the visit and you've got to come."

"Good-bye! You're a dear, Lou, anyhow!" Mrs. Ladd called after her, standing in the doorway in the clear, keen sunshine and shivering a little.

And then Miss Hollins heard the door close as she went out of the gate and on down the road to Father Zujewski's. She walked rapidly and paid no heed to the asters like smoke in the pastures, and the watchet of the hills in the September haze. She was too busy arguing with her conscience and planning for the interview that was so dreaded and so imminent. But it is no easy matter to plan what we shall say to, and how we shall behave with, a person who is nothing more than a name to us, especially when the name is not very pleasant-sounding or very pleasantly suggestive. So Miss Hollins went on picturing herself as addressing, with reserved yet Christian kindness, either a fat monk with a red nose, and a glass of wine in his hand, such as she had seen pictured on smoking-sets for jovial gentlemen, or a tall, sinister, dark-browed man holding an uplifted crucifix in one hand, and pointing with the other to an Inquisitional pile

of burning fagots, a figure such as she had trembled to contemplate in the history-book of her Academy days. Of the two, she at once decided that she would find it easier to discuss the delicate matter with the first; then, her temperance principles made the second seem infinitely preferable.

However, just as she left the last of Dr. Britton's evergreen hedge behind her, and the small, brown frame church with the cross-tipped belfry came into view, flanked by the brown frame rectory in its clump of yellowing apple and crab and plum and cherry trees, with its ragged brown buckwheat field and its pile of pumpkins against the fence, all her preparations of the gospel of peace were arrested and scattered by the most extraordinary of noises. Had she expected any noise in so unexplored a spot, it would have been the "droning chant of Latin hymns," as the history had expressed it, from the church, or, remembering Stefan and his intimacy with the priest, the most lovely and appealing of harmonies from the rectory. The din that so amazed her, however, proceeded from the rear of the house in the shade of the fruit trees, and was of so fearful and barbaric a character that recollections of the Tartars and their invasions

flashed into her mind. It was the clangor of iron upon tin, of discordant bells, of hoarse voices yelling "Whoa! Whoa!" and it was accompanied by a thick blue smoke that rose in clouds among the tree-tops.

Miss Hollins hesitated. Probably it was some sort of outdoor service and her presence would be embarrassing and her visit ineffectual. But she would never dare to make the effort again. She pushed the little gate wider open and stepped in upon the garden path with its border of cornflowers and snapdragon and mignonette in an overgrown, half-frosted tangle. Poor little Prunella! It was n't much to do, after all, when her happiness lay in its issue. And whatever the strange rites, Dr. Britton spoke highly of the man!

Just as her skirts brushed the last of the mignonette and she stood upon the little stoop preparing to ring the doorbell, the din grew even wilder, the smoke thicker, and around the corner of the house rushed what to Miss Hollins's nearsighted eyes and excited fancy appeared to be an officiating priest. He was heavily veiled and thickly gloved and with a strange weapon he seemed to be beating at imaginary aërial foes. Reports in missionary journals flashed

instantly into her thought. But at the sight of her, the man had come to a sudden halt, and by the time she had fumbled for her glasses in her little black bag, he had approached and was saying in a quiet, pleasant voice, and in the slowest and most barbarous of English, — "You will forgif us? Ze bees. Zey swarm all sudden — up in ze tree. Ze boy an' I, we mek big fight. You will come in an' be so good an' wait fife minutes?"

Miss Hollins laughed and got on her glasses.

"Dear me! Of course! I never thought of bees. And swarming now? I thought June was the time for swarming."

He held his Dixie bee brush gingerly with its half-dozen crawling bees. "June iss ze time. But when ze summer it mek mistake an' stay so long, zey mek mistake, too. Zey sink June here once more again."

He laughed genially. Through the veil she could see his dark bright eyes and his slow smile.

"It iss not hard to mek mistake an' be like young again," he added, "when ze wevver it mek June."

Of course, he could n't be the priest, she was thinking. He fitted into none of her conceptions of priests. He was neither fat nor lean,

nor, as far as she could read through his bee veil and his manner, sinister nor threatening.

"Oh, I see!" she said. "I don't know a thing about bees. I'm deadly afraid of them and all other bugs. Then Father Zujewski is not at home?"

The beeman laughed aloud heartily. "Zat iss funny. I am Fazzer Zujewski. An' my bees, zey will not sting you, if you will like to come and see ze fun."

In her amazement she did follow him round the house into the sweet, sun-flecked orchard, with its rows of white hives on the close-cut grass. And there she beheld another man, younger and slimmer and more agile, and likewise veiled and gloved, perched in the big cherry tree, in the cloud of smoke ascending from the Corneil smoker carefully tended by a bee-acolyte at the foot of the tree, the bee-acolyte being an old woman with a little red shawl pinned over her head. The barbaric clangor seemed to be over, but on the grass under the cherry tree lay a large dinner-bell, a tin dishpan, a tin pail, an iron spoon, and a bulky potato-masher. No doubt the old woman and the young man in the tree and the veiled priest had all been performers in the bee symphony.

Miss Hollins sat down upon a wheelbarrow at a discreet distance and lifted up her skirts. It was well to be prepared for flight. But no precautions seemed necessary; for the old woman was gathering up the dishpan and the bell and the pail and the spoon and the potato-masher, and retiring behind the woodbine that covered the back porch, and Father Zujewski stood calmly under the cherry tree conversing in a strange tongue with the veiled young man in the yellowing branches. In another few minutes, the young man descended with a box of bees in his hand, and dumped them on a white cloth spread in front of an open hive, and then stood with Father Zujewski watching the little revolutionists crawling peacefully back into their quarters.

So serene and sunny, and so fragrant of ripe apples and clover and catnip and mint and late garden sweetness was the orchard that Miss Hollins began to lose all fear of the interview and to dream a little of nothing at all, as the late summer days trick us into doing, when suddenly and quite dramatically she was recalled to her mission. The bees, evidently, were all safely housed, for the two beemen were turning away from the hives, and coming across the grass to-

wards her. So occupied and interested was she in looking at the unveiled priest, before whom she was so soon to lay her case, that she was wholly unprepared when the younger man took off both veil and hat and stood revealed before her.

"Zis young man you will know," Father Zujewski was saying, with a little smile. "He iss my friend, Stefan Posadowski, who has so beautifully played for us. He iss a good boy."

And then, when Miss Hollins held out her hand to the young man so well recommended, he did what at home, in his own land, he had been taught to do on greeting a lady who is beautiful or good or wise or of high rank; he bent over her hand and kissed it with a fervor that made Miss Hollins's heart skip a beat and her cheeks grow a pink that was almost as youthful as Prunella's. Then he looked very frankly and directly into her eyes and stammered,—

"Fazzer Zujewski, he tell you about me. But I, myself, I will tell how much I lofe ze beautiful lady who iss your niece. I will lofe her like"—he flushed all over his thin, clear-cut, olive face—"like she—she ze best friend of—of ze Madonna."

Tears blurred Miss Hollins's glasses. Prunella glimmered in a halo caught from the pure passion of her lover's words.

"Prunella is everything I have in the world," she said.

And then Stefan went away over the grass into the house without another word, and Father Zujewski repeated, "He iss a good boy, zat Stefan. His heart iss pure an' so God let him mek gret music. An' will you not come into ze house where we can spick togezzer?"

So she followed him into the rectory, with its smell of baking bread, and its sunshine through uncurtained windows on bare, well-scoured floors with brilliantly ugly rugs of ingrain carpet, and into a meagrely furnished little office with a great ivy vine running around the white walls, around the big black crucifix over the desk and the pictures of St. Stanislaus and John Sobieski and Leo XIII.

She began at once, when he had seated her at the window by the starting-point of all the green festooning, the ivy pot, and seated himself opposite her under the crucifix.

"You will be surprised at my coming when you know why I have come," she said, going at once to her point. "Your friend Stefan has

disturbed my niece Prunella. We are quite alone, Prunella and I, and she has always talked everything over with me. But, you see, she has never had a — a —"

"A lofer?" he finished gently. "Of course, zen it is different. Zey must know, ze muzzers, wizout ze young girls to spick, like ze — ze flowers under ze snow."

"Of course, and I do understand, but then, Prunella is — is peculiar. She has always been proud and independent and has laughed at — at love and all that sort of thing. And of course your young friend is foreign. We know nothing about him, and his people are — are not in the least like us. I don't mean to say that Prunella is in love with him. But she's been changed and unlike herself ever since the concert."

He sat listening with the little smile of one who could very well understand.

"And it just makes me anxious," she finished quickly. "I must know something about the young man so — so that when — when I do talk to Prunella I shall know what to say. With Prunella you must have facts, and even then she 'll — she 'll do as she pleases. She's like her father."

He got up and opened his desk and took out

a small miniature-case that seemed to have been placed there ready to his hand.

"It iss ze muzzer of Stefan," he said, opening it and handing it to her. "It will not mek you to be afraid — zat face."

And truly it did not make her in the least afraid, that fine, clear-cut, dark face that was so like and yet unlike Stefan's, under its garland of small white roses, with the filmy scarf around the white shoulders. The eyes and the delicate droop of the mouth would have allayed any fears as to what inheritance she had left him.

"She was ze sister of Wieniaski, name Alexia, an' one great, wonderful voice God gafe her. An' she sing in ze church in ze little village on ze Vistula, an' a gret lady hear her an' she tek her to Varsovie an' she study much an' sing an' sing all ofer — ze Czar hear her an' ze Kaiser an' all ofer she sing. An' always in ze church she lofe much to sing. Always was she pure an' good, an' so iss Stefan. An' zen in Petersburg comes Nicholas Posadowski an' he lofe her an' she lofe him, an' he a gret prince in his country. An' Alexia say, 'See here, I will nefer go wiz you wizout we are all married. I good girl, an' if I lofe, always I lofe, but I will be married else I go not.' An' zey were married. Wien-

iaski he has ze papers to show. An' ze family of ze prince zey were crazy, an' zey say it iss not marriage. An' in two year ze prince he die an' Alexia an' Stefan are left, an' Alexia, she die because her heart break, an' ze nuns in Varsovie, zey tek little Stefan. An' he stay by ze nuns till Wieniaski he hear an' he come an' tek him an' bring him here to America. So I haf tole you ze story of Stefan. An' you will see here, please." And he handed her another case, and on the purple velvet lay the gleaming thing that she had seen the night of the concert on the lapel of Stefan's coat. "It iss ze war medal of Prince Nicholas Posadowski," he finished, a little proudly. And as he finished, in the next room the son of the prince began to play a Polish folk-song, as if to remind those who heard that his mother had come of the folk.

Miss Hollins drew a very long breath. It was infinitely more astonishing than she had expected. It was quite as nice and romantic as anything in Mary J. Holmes's novels. What would Dr. Britton say to it all? And Olivia and Mary Ladd? And to think that her little hard-working Prunella was the heroine of it all! But then as a family they were entitled to it.

"Now you fill not afraid?" he was going on

softly. "But best it iss that Stefan iss a good boy. To be rich it iss much easy zan — zan to be unashamed before — before angels. And now he will go away to study to his own land. I haf spoken much wiz Wieniaski, an' he haf much onions an' he say 'yes,' an' Mrs. Wieniaski she un'erstan'. An' before he go if — if — " he hesitated and colored faintly under his thick olive skin. "I fill sure you need not to haf fear. An' it will keep Stefan to be a good boy."

Miss Hollins colored, too, faintly, as she got up and held out her hand. "Now," she said firmly, " now I shall put it all into God's hands. It's been taken out of mine. And I thank you."

"It iss a good place, in God's hands," he answered as he returned her hand-clasp heartily. " An' sometimes our prayers a long time zey seem to stay zare — in God's hands. But always zey are safe. An' now you will haf a little honey. It iss ze food for young ladies because only of flowers it iss made."

When he had gone out, Miss Hollins stood staring absently at the crucifix. In the next room Stefan was playing softly as if he were telling the piano many secret things. Leaf shadows flickered on the bare floor. It was a large moment.

"To hive bees it iss much easy zan to guide ze young hearts," he said, coming in with a small basket filled with golden honeycomb in a nest of grape leaves. "Ze bees, zey know always what iss good to mek ze honey an' what iss not good. It iss not always so wiz ze young peoble. Much wisdom my bees gif to me to teach my peoble. An' Mademoiselle Prunelle — iss it not so zat you call her? — she iss like a bee. She has know what mek good honey."

An hour later Mademoiselle Prunelle was spreading the honey on a slice of bread, twisting it round and round in a golden rope on the spoon.

"And you got it from a Polander on the way to Mrs. Ladd's, Aunt Lou?" she said, biting into the lusciousness. "I think I know the very one you mean. Drives a bony horse in a little red wagon and has a bristly beard? Peddles chickens, too. He lives out at Fernfield Four Corners and has dozens of children. But it's bully honey, anyhow."

"Probably," Miss Hollins said vaguely through the little window in the pantry. "Now, Prunella, I'm going to wash these dishes. You've got to keep your hands out of the dish-water."

CHAPTER XXIV

"ME HEART SENT ME FLYIN'"

It was very late, almost midnight, and the problems in improper fractions seemed endless. Olivia was wondering why in the world she had given them so many problems at once when she knew she would have to work each one out in order to be intelligent upon the subject. If it had been calculus or trigonometry! But improper fractions lined off in interminable little pens in the painstaking little figures! When she came to By Smith's paper she pondered it, smiling.

"I love you and so does Apollonia," By had carefully printed down the sides of his pens of fraction problems.

They were her ardent lovers, the two children, with their offerings of last flowers and best apples and little gourds and silky red onions. To them, life out of school meant nothing but the search for means of passionate expression. Latest had been Apollonia's dried butterfly with its gorgeous yellow and black wings.

The fire was low and she stirred the coals into a little flame. She had brought her work from her father's desk in the far corner by the window, and sat near the hearth in her little-girl rocker, with her papers near her knee. The clock out in the cold hall struck twelve. Mrs. Ladd had gone up long ago with her little lamp and her nightly, "Don't work too late, dear, and get all tired out."

"I love you and so does Apollonia," her thought still echoed even after she had put the coveted "100" upon the paper and finished the little pile that lay under it. Truly, school was illuminated by the love that looked out of the childish eyes. There was an ecstasy even in improper fractions when they were added and subtracted and multiplied and divided with such hot childish love. And then — and then — after school! Even there, in the utter loneliness and quiet of the old study, even in the highly inadequate light from the far lamp and the dying fire, with only maps of state and county, and engravings of prosy judges and statesmen to look down upon her, — even there her heart beat fast and her cheeks burned. After school — countless times — all during the blue of October — in the sweet Indian summer

that glorified November — even now, in the strangely gentle days of early December — there had been the automobile. It had all happened as quietly, as inevitably, as her going to school in the morning, that he should overtake her on her way home in the afternoon, and, after stowing away two or more enraptured children on the back seat, whirl her off through pale-gold cornfields with their yellow blotches of pumpkins and squashes, past purplish patches of beets, past garnered onion fields with their long windrows of shimmering opalescent onions, away to the far hills that looked so low and near in the afternoon light. And sometimes so far in the hills did they find themselves that a big red hunter's moon hung in the black tree-tops on Toby and gilded the watering-trough at Fernfield Four Corners when they slowed down at the familiar stopping-place. And yet she could swear that they had been wholly impersonal in their talk, those two on the front seat. Wholly agricultural had been the purpose of those joyous rides, wholly in accordance with the earnest recommendations of the professors in the Agricultural College two months before. And they had vigorously discussed agricultural problems, slowing up to see the immediate and

practical treatment of the fields so recently harvested, in the ploughing and the fertilizing with the tobacco stems of the recently garnered crop; peering into the odorous dusk of onion storehouses and doing problems to calculate cost of storehouses and fertilizers and boxes for packing. Sometimes, the problems were passed on to the radiant ones munching stolen apples on the back seat, and the other two would go into the stubbly fields where had grown the tent-tobacco, and where shreds of the tent still fluttered from the lines and poles, and there they would fill their palms with soil and crumble it and compare it; and then, presently, when they had ridden on a little way, there would be a stop at a brook and Miss Ladd would spring out and run down under the naked, shivering little birches and alders to wash her hands. And one day she had not gone alone; his hands, too, needed washing after the loam of the fields. And — and — that was the only day that he had forgotten! He had stood on one side of the brook in the clear gold of the sunshine, holding his hand to her on the other as she had risen from the little pool, and he had reddened as vividly as the swamp maple behind them. And with a laugh in his eyes that was yet full of something like sadness, he had

said, in a very low tone considering the fields all around them, —

"In my country, to clasp hands across water — do you — do you know what it is meaning?"

And then she had burned with quick anger and had turned away and got back to her seat in silence, and going home there had been no talk even of the heavy wagons loaded with bags of onions that made the automobile swing so far out of the road, and she had bitten her lips and vowed never again, never again to go with him. And at Fernfield Four Corners she had not looked at him when little Stefanya and Leo had turned with her away from him down the village street. But she had gone again the next day. It was better not to notice his foolishness.

Yes, she could swear to it that, except for that day, never once had there been said anything that Dacre might not have overheard — and Aileen. Somehow he had heard about Dacre, and she had guessed about Aileen from what Bride had said that day at the tea, and then, too, there was that strange silver ring that he wore. It was the fisherman's betrothal ring. He had called it a Claddagh ring and she had looked it up in the encyclopedia at the library and knew all about it. She had told him that she

knew all about it, and he had got quite red, and had said that perhaps she was too clever in her inferences. And of course they both understood. Their side of the affair was quite clear and safe. And then they had been careful about Mrs. Clabby and Prunella. Fernfield Four Corners had always been the end of the ride.

But there was another side to the affair; indeed, there were several other sides. In the first place, her own respect for herself was humiliatingly on the decrease. She had gone back on her own principle, her own best judgment, her proudest sense of family and tradition. But she had had the satisfaction of telling him that at first she had hated him, and then he had confessed that at first he had hated and feared her. And she had hated him heartily. She remembered that first day in the town hall, that day at the Major's funeral when she had so loathed him, and had prayed that he and the other invaders would be driven out, those days in the Agricultural College when she had barely endured having him in front of her, and then had hated herself when she found that she was enduring him, even tolerating him and not avoiding him. And then, in the second place, there had been the fear of what her mother was

thinking. Of course, she had told her mother nothing, except that when on the rainy days Mr. Joyce had brought her home, she had said, lightly. "Was n't it nice of him, Mamma, to bring me home!" And Mrs. Ladd had looked at her with a little smile and answered, "It is very nice for him that you should permit him to bring you home, dear. Don't let him be falling in love with you. You are n't that kind, Olivia!" And then she had answered, again very lightly, "How foolish, Mamma! He 's engaged — his sister said so — to an Irish beauty, whose picture hangs in the castle of the Duchess of Connaught." Oh, there was nothing she dreaded more than her mother's delicate scorn! And now there were two things for her mother to scorn, but with a very different kind of scorn. If she should come to know about Dacre before the — the right time — and how far and how dim seemed that right time! — she would die of scorn for Olivia's having been a fool, and she would shrug her thin, graceful shoulders and give a bitter little laugh, and say, "Why, my dear, I 'm not in the least surprised. Even you could not conquer heredity." But if she should come to know of the automobile and the invader's entrance into her proud stronghold, she

would say but little — perhaps, "Of course, it is hard for a girl to have none of her own class around her. But then, somehow, Olivia, I did count at least upon your discrimination!"

And then the other side, the Dacre side. That was where ghosts walked. Always there the old Major's cold blue eyes looked at her and his high old voice cried, "One generation of ruin is enough. Make a man of him if you can." And she was trying to make a man of him, although as yet she had not had the courage to "ask old Joyce about the life insurance." The process of making a man of Dacre had seemed a very different matter in the sweet June weather, when she was flushed and confident after her college triumphs, and still tingling with the pain of telling him to go away after all those long years of boy and girl sweethearting, and when he had been there in all his gay masterfulness and his beauty and his faith in her faith in him. Then the process had seemed as sure as that the old fields would yield great crops if they were given their chance. But now! What was the matter with her? She buried her face in her hands and tried to think it out, the Dacre side. What was the matter with him that

had not always been the matter? Was it that she was getting her measure of a man?

And then there was still another side, the bitter, delicate side! In June the mortgage would be due. Suppose the old fields should n't make a good showing! Suppose the tobacco she was counting upon from Wyzocki for her biggest money — suppose it should n't be a success! Suppose it —

And as she pondered, Dacre's setter whined at the door, and she got up sleepily to let him in. He had come down from her threshold where he spent the night, probably to see why she had not come to bed. As she opened the door into the cold hall and he ran in, a noise upstairs startled her. Could anything be the matter that her mother was up? She could hear bottles moving and closet doors opening. Then a long dark shadow fell across the ceiling in the upstairs hall. More bottles rattled and one fell with a little crash.

"Mamma! Mamma!" she cried. "Is anything the matter? Are you ill?" It was all quite plain now. Her mother was looking for something in the medicine-chest in the upper hall. "Are you ill, Mamma?"

The light upstairs wavered. "The ginger,

Olivia," came down faintly. "It hurts me to — to breathe —"

"Yes, Mamma! All right! I'm coming," she cried. Thank God the tea-kettle was on, and if the kitchen fire had n't gone out! She caught up the lamp and ran out to see. In the bottom of the kettle there was a lukewarm cupful. She poured it out and fled upstairs.

Mrs. Ladd had gone back to her room and sat shivering on the side of the high old four-poster, very gray and small in her dark flannel wrapper.

"Why, Mamma dear! Why did n't you call before?" Olivia cried. "There, get back into bed. I have some warm water, and I 'll find the ginger. You see, your bed is cold. That 's what is the matter. Now I 'm going to warm you up." And she lifted her back into bed and tucked her in and found the ginger. "Nasty stuff, is n't it, Mamma!" she said, bringing the glass.

"You ought to have been in bed long ago, dear," Mrs. Ladd whispered as she drank. "Now I 'll be all right. Go to bed, won't you!"

"Right away, Mamma. Just as soon as I heat some water to put into the hot-water bag. There now! You 're all tucked up. I 'll be back in a minute."

And then she flew down again through the dark, chill hall to the kitchen. Now, now the very worst was coming, she was wildly thinking, with her heart in her throat, as she lighted the old kitchen lamp with the tin reflector and went out into the woodshed for chips and kindling. Anything for a quick fire! Ben was welcome company for her as she ran to and fro in and out of the dark and the loneliness, with this new terror in her heart, lighting the fire, filling the tea-kettle, and then blowing the slow flames into a flicker, alert all the while for the sounds from above. But there were no sounds. The shabby old rooms looked strange and unfamiliar in the stillness and the long shadows of midnight. When at last she bore her steaming pitcher upstairs, the memory of her father dead there in the long parlors came vividly back to her with a terror that she read as foreboding.

Mrs. Ladd had fallen into a heavy, quick-breathing sleep, with feverish cheeks. Even when Olivia put the warmth to her feet and lifted her to drink hot water and whiskey, she did not rouse, but drank obediently and then rambled a little about letting out the tucks in Olivia's little skirts.

The clock struck one. Olivia and Ben brought

more kindling and coal and built a fire in the long-unused grate in Mrs. Ladd's room, sending strange shadows of bed and canopy and of Olivia herself up and down the walls and ceiling. Then, there on the hearth-rug, they sat, listening and watching during the interminable hours, Olivia realizing and fearing and planning. At dawn some one would surely be passing and she could send for Dr. Barker and — and for some one else. But who was the some one else? Not Mrs. Archibald or Mrs. Clabby or Mrs. Egerton or Sarah Tibbetts. None of them could she let intimately near that proud, reserved mother of hers. And Miss Hollins had her boarders and Prunella was n't well. If there had only been Mrs. Britton, as there used to be when any one in the village was ill or in trouble! But there was n't Mrs. Britton or any one like her. And there was school next day and no one to take charge of it. And then she dozed off in the warmth, resting her head against the big halfway house chair, and dreamed that she was in the automobile, and there was a child right in the road and she clutched Mr. Joyce's arm and screamed and — With a start she awoke and sprang to her feet. The clock was again striking. The windows were gray. Her mother had turned

over and lay in the same feverish sleep with her face to the faded wallpaper. From downstairs there came suddenly the sound of the chopping of wood. Ben's ears pricked.

"It 's Timothy, Ben!" she said. "He 's come to chop the wood for breakfast. Bless him! Bless him! Now we 'll see. We 'll see, Ben."

It was Timothy, in muffler and mittens, chopping kindling by the light of the cracked lantern in the woodshed.

"Begorra, it 's a could mornin'," he cried briskly, "an' not a wink of slape had I f'r thinkin' o' ye widout kindlin' enough t' bile an egg. But y're white as a shate, Miss, an' thremblin'. For God's sake, what ails y'?"

Olivia stood shivering in the doorway.

"Mamma is very ill," she said tremulously, "and you must get the doctor right away, Timothy, just as fast as you can. I 'll make the fire while you 're gone, and then there 'll be some hot cof— "

"Faix, it 's not hot coffee I'm thinkin' of," he broke in, dropping the hatchet and gathering up an armful of sticks. "But it 's who else I 'll be bringin' t' help y', child. Y're not fit t' be all alone wid all the cookin' an' the nursin' an' —"

"No, no, Timothy!" she protested. "Don't get any one. I 'm all right. Just the doctor, and quick. Then we 'll do what he says. But I 'm all right, Timothy."

"God love y', I will," he said vaguely, running to bring in a hod of coal. "I 'll have him here as quick as that ould bone of a horse 'll bring him. God love y', child. Don't kill yersel' with worry. It will all come right."

And then he scurried away in the frosty air, and Olivia sank down by the kitchen table and hid her face close in her hands. Somehow, faithful old Timothy had been too much for her. But she pressed back her tears and built the new fire on the embers of the midnight one, and ground the coffee, with breathless intermissions for listening at the hall door and for running upstairs; and soon broad daylight filled the rooms.

In one of the throbbing intervals of listening an unexpected sound startled her. It was a motor-horn with a strangely familiar note. Very clearly and cheerily it shrieked out in the frosty air, growing ever nearer and nearer. Presently it stopped and a machine rounded the corner of the house. And then the tea-kettle began to boil over, and there were voices outside and the

chugging of a big engine. She ran to the side door and opened it. Perhaps it was the doctor in the Joyces' motor-car. It would be just like the Joyces to pick him up and bring him.

But it was old Timothy that was strutting proudly from the machine, calling out to her, "Faith, the doctor's comin', but it's hersel' I've brought t' help y'." And following him there came, neither so bravely nor so confidently, but swiftly, and with both hands outstretched to her, Bride Joyce.

"Y' can send me away an' it'll be quite all right," she was saying softly, "I'll understand. But as I was going t' early Mass I met old Timothy an' he was after tellin' me, an' me heart sent me flyin' an'—an' Pat said to come. It's very much I've been with sickness, the way perhaps I can help y', Miss Ladd."

Olivia leaned very limply against the door, very weary and pale and disheveled. She was becoming aware that at the wheel sat Mr. Patrick Joyce and that he was looking at her.

"Bride would love t' stay with y'," he said. "An' I'll fly along up to school an' make it all right f'r y'. You will, please?"

And then somehow Bride's arms went round her and Bride led her into the house, and old

Timothy poured hot coffee. And when the doctor had come and Olivia had taken him upstairs, and there had been those fearful moments in Mrs. Ladd's room with the shutters thrown wide and the cold light and the little black stethoscope, it was again into Bride's open arms that she went at the foot of the stairs to hear him say, —

"Your mother 's pretty well worn out, Olivia. It 's pneumonia. There 's a chance, of course. You 'll stay, I hope, Miss Joyce?"

"Sure I 'll stay," Bride answered. "An' we 'll take the chance, with God's help."

CHAPTER XXV

"TO — TO SHE WHO ISS MY MUSIC!"

ALTHOUGH Miss Hollins had promised to leave matters in the hands of God, she found it very hard not to assist in the management. Prunella herself showed no such exalted intention of abandoning her affairs to Divine Providence. Indeed, she seemed to regard herself as wholly capable of bringing them to a happy and dignified conclusion.

A few days after she had first partaken of Father Zujewski's honey, just as she was going to open the noon mail, she stood at the kitchen door, holding the screen so invitingly ajar that no fly of even the lowest degree of intelligence, would refuse to enter.

"Aunt Lou," she said abruptly, "it's because you trust me and you don't laugh that I'm going to tell you. But it does make me feel like a—a fool to talk about it, after all I used to say. I've thought it all out. You know what I mean. And once a week, every Sunday night, after I close the early Monday mail, I'm going to let him walk home with me. That's not too

much, considering he 's going away, and — and — he 's so fearfully respectful. Don't tell a soul, will you, Aunt Lou? Don't whisper it to Olivia."

"Of course not, Prunella. But do shut that door and keep the flies out. This mild weather 's hatched out a new lot. And of course I trust you — absolutely, child. But I do wish you 'd trust me more. I know a little about such affairs."

"Oh, I do trust you, Aunt Lou. But I seem so — so silly to myself. And there 's nothing to tell."

And so Miss Hollins contented herself with reading signs: the flowers and autumn berries that Prunella brought home, her laborious and unmelodious efforts to pick out the scale from the old green "Easy Method for Piano Playing," the newly careful and coquettish way she did her curly brown hair, the old white gloves in which she slept — or lay awake — after copious anointings with Orange Flower Skin Food, the small Polish Primer that fell out of the shabby black cloth bag she carried to and from the post-office, and, most significant of all, the care she took to speak of the new residents of Fernfield as "the Polish people" and not "the Polanders." And as well, on the four or five

Sunday nights between the gladioli Sunday and Stefan's farewell, all the while that Miss Hollins sat trying to put her mind on the Scriptures, she was really listening, with throbbing heart, for lingering footsteps in the quiet street, and for Prunella's softly murmured "good-night" at the gate.

And Miss Kirk, too, read signs, but not aloud, except one night in the dark in the upstairs hall, when she pressed into Prunella's hand a little leather case, whispering, "There, dearest, don't say a word. Just wear it on a little white ribbon around your neck where no one can see it. It will help you with your music."

Prunella took it breathlessly and ran down to the kitchen where Miss Hollins was making pumpkin pies.

"Do look, Aunt Lou! See what Miss Kirk has given me," she cried. "It 's a secret, but you 'd see it anyhow if I wore it around my neck as she said to do." And then she gave a little gasp and grew rosy as the opening of the little case revealed a small locket of black enamel with a purple and gold diamond-hearted pansy in the middle and a little empty place inside for a picture.

"It's just the thing, Prunella," Miss Hollins exclaimed. "Now you do just as Miss Kirk says."

And that night in the dark hall Miss Kirk was as much astonished as if bandits had rushed out from the fastnesses of the housemaid's closet, and flourished poniards, for Prunella stole out and kissed her.

But seemingly, as the days wore on and the North German Lloyd Steamship Company booked Mr. Stefan Posadowski, second class, for the first December sailing, Stefan himself was not content to leave affairs wholly in the hands of Providence.

Prunella, indeed, intimated as much when she said abruptly, polishing the brass knocker until she herself shone from it in refracted bits of color, —

"Stefan 's coming to see you to-morrow morning, Aunt Lou, about ten, to talk — talk over things. And you said to get Sultana raisins and Welcome soap and — "

"For pity's sake, Prunella! In the morning! Whatever shall I do! I can't put on my china silk in the morning. I never did such a thing in my life."

"But why should you, Aunt Lou? Stefan

does n't care. He does n't know the difference."

"But the appropriateness, Prunella! That's one thing you've always lacked, dear, a sense of appropriateness. And as a family we've always had it."

"Appropriateness! Dear me! Poor Stefan! Mrs. Wieniaski —"

"Mrs. Wieniaski has nothing to do with it, Prunella. Stefan is n't of her blood. He's Mr. Wieniaski's sister's child, you said."

"I know I did. But Mr. Wieniaski is n't what you 'd call a — a —"

"That does n't make the least bit of difference, my dear! It's wholly a matter of appropriateness. And somehow — you need n't say a word — I'll slip upstairs and get on my china silk before he comes."

And the next morning Prunella was not sorry the china silk graced the occasion, but she was unprepared for the point-lace collar that replaced Miss Hollins's usual frill of net, and for the brooch of clustered diamonds that usually was safely hidden in an old stocking between the mattresses on the fourposter. After the brooch, she was not unduly amazed to see, upon Miss Hollins's delicately turned wrist, the

fringed bracelet of ribbon gold that ran through a slide. So arrayed, Miss Hollins sat in the parlor by the centre table, with the family Bible not inconspicuous among the photographs and flowers and little china ornaments. But Prunella did not stop for more than a glance when she rushed in from the office and fled upstairs to hide herself.

However, in the very brief interval between ten o'clock and seven minutes after, when the front gate clicked, Miss Hollins saw various flecks of dust on various objects, and made swift dabs at them with her best pocket handkerchief. After one of these excursions, she had hardly time to compose herself at the table, with her hand on the family Bible, as seemed right and proper, when Robbie opened the front door with perhaps indelicate promptness and ushered Mr. Stefan Posadowski into her presence. The matter of Robbie's answering the bell had been a confidential arrangement. Prunella would not have understood its appropriateness, and Robbie had been quite willing to wait in the cloak closet under the stairs.

And when Stefan entered, Miss Hollins was at once agreeably aware that she had been right in insisting upon the appropriateness of

certain arrangements to such an occasion, and as well that it really was a good deal of an occasion. Stefan's pale face and grave bearing, the pink rosebud in his button-hole, and the bunch of full white Druschki roses that he handed to her as he bent over her hand and kissed it with his fervent, "My heart is at ze feet, gracious lady,"—all this very extraordinary behavior on the part of a guest in the little parlor made Miss Hollins feel very sure that nothing could be too appropriate to such an occasion.

"Do sit down," she said cordially, when she had recovered her hand. "And thank you so much for the roses. They are most beautiful. I did n't know you could get such roses at this time of year."

Stefan had seated himself on the extreme edge of the most uncomfortable of the high-backed, spindle-legged chairs. He held his soft gray felt hat in his slender, shapely brown hands. As she spoke, a faint color came to his olive cheeks and he swallowed hard.

"Ze city," he said. "In ze city I get zem. Zey are nutting."

"Oh, they are lovely!" she insisted. "And I have never seen you to thank you for the fine music at our concert."

He colored more deeply. "I like if you like it," he said.

And, meanwhile, she was wanting to say every kind thing in the world to this shy, uncomfortable young man with the very clear eyes that looked so frankly, and yet so beseechingly, into hers. She blushed as she realized that she would really like to put her arms around him and kiss his forehead and say to him, "My boy! My boy! I've seen the picture of your beautiful mother. You have her eyes." But, of course, she said nothing that was of so sentimental a character, and no one would ever have guessed that she was even thinking it. She did, however, have the inspiration to leave the shelter of the family Bible and seat him less formally. It suddenly seemed to her that tact and graciousness were the easiest things in the world.

"Suppose we sit over on the davenport," she said. "Then we can talk much better."

And when they were side by side she found herself going on—surely because Providence was helping her—

"And the other day your priest told me your wonderful story. Your story is like what you play."

"It iss what I play—zat an' my country's

story, an' now — now, ze uzzer story," he said in a lower tone. "Always now I am playing ze uzzer story."

"The other story?" she laughed. "Prunella, you mean? She's a dear child, anyhow." He was crushing his hat-brim in his supple fingers.

"To me she iss pure like stars, an' beautiful like flowers. I cannot gif her stars. Stars I mus' play to her. But flowers I bring."

"She is a dear, good child, Prunella is," she repeated. She was getting a little frightened at his grave intensity. Her own heart began to beat too fast. Then quite suddenly so much happened that she forgot everything but an old steel engraving called "The Suppliant Lover" in "The Lady's Keepsake" in the parlor of her childhood.

Stefan, quite pale again, was the Suppliant Lover. He had once more lifted her hand and kissed it fervently while he sank upon one knee at her side and looked at her with eyes that burned as pure as Grail lights.

"You will forgif, gracious lady, if too much I ask," he began finely and fervently. Then less finely and even more fervently, "I lofe her. Next by God I lofe her. Not yet I tell her. I wait zat you say 'yes.' An' zis I tell you. I haf

— of myself — all to gif her. I haf no money. That I mek for her. But of myself I haf all — all since I was born. Never no uzzer woman. My fazzer, he was prince. But Fazzer Zujewski he say, all time, it iss more high than prince to haf all to gif to a woman I lofe. I haf all — an' if you will trus'! Ze money I mek wiz my fingers. An' zen I come back — "

And then it was that Miss Hollins achieved her highest. She leaned forward and put a hand on each of Stefan's shoulders, and kissed him right on his forehead under the lock of hair that would n't lie smooth.

"My boy! My boy!" she murmured. "Of course I 'll trust you. Now you wait a minute." And then, while he was getting up from being the Suppliant Lover, she went into the hall and called quite clearly, "Prunella! Prunella! Come quickly!"

And Prunella came quickly, flushed, very bright-eyed, tremulous, and stood uncertain on the threshold.

"I 've kissed him on the forehead where his mother would like to kiss him, dear," Miss Hollins said. "Now I 'm going to get him a cake to take away with him."

And as she went, she knew, although she

did not look back, that Stefan dropped his hat, and took Prunella into his arms, and that Prunella did not kiss him on the forehead.

When presently she returned with one cake all tied up in a box ready for any amount of rushing by land and tossing by sea, and another cut into golden slices on a Canton plate, flanked with little glasses and a small fat decanter of dandelion wine, it seemed as natural as daylight for Stefan to be holding Prunella's right hand and for Prunella at that moment to be gazing at a ring on the ring finger of her left hand.

"Oh, Aunt Lou! See! Is n't it adorable! It was Stefan's mother's," she cried, half in a dream.

And it was adorable, the ring made of six fine, fine little rings, each banded with a different jewel.

"Ze nuns, when my muzzer die, always have kept it for me," Stefan explained, looking up with his half smile.

"Of course it 's adorable," Miss Hollins said, putting down her tray next to the Bible. "But it 's no more adorable than Stefan's mother was. Wait till you 've seen her picture, Prunella. You see, I 've known all about Stefan for — for some time. And I suppose he is too

modest to tell you that his father was a prince, Prince Nicholas Posadowski. I've known all about it, of course, Prunella."

Prunella lifted Stefan's hand and shyly and quickly kissed it.

"No, he has not told me," she said, still dreamily, looking at him with a deep little smile. "It would be all right anyway."

Miss Hollins was passing the cake. "Now take a big piece, Stefan," she said. "It's good cake, if I do say so as should n't. And here's your wine. Prunella gathered the dandelions. And the glasses my father used when he entertained the Massachusetts Bench."

Stefan sprang up and touched his glass to Prunella's. Then high against the sunny east window he watched it sparkle, his face flushed and smiling into a new Stefan.

"To — to — to she who iss my music!" he said. Then he bent to touch Miss Hollins's glass. "An' to — to she what gif me my music!" he finished as he drained his glass.

CHAPTER XXVI

TAKING THE CHANCE

WHILE Fate was spinning so fast and so sure for Prunella and Stefan, Olivia and Bride were taking the chance in the sad old house through the gray days that ever threatened snow. And truly not much of a chance did it seem from the very first, with Mrs. Ladd every day more and more of a hoarse, delirious shadow in the high-posted old bed, talking, talking, telling all the close-hid secrets of years, and always with the muttered refrain about the Irish stealing the place from her. At first, when the querulous voice had begun its revelations and its complaints, Olivia's impulse had been to keep Bride out of the sick-room and to take all the nursing herself. But Bride, in her noiseless white gown, had gone to the bedside and laid her cool, firm hand on Mrs. Ladd's hot wandering one a moment, and then had lifted her and turned her pillows, and said, "Go to sleep, dear one. Go to sleep. Everything 's all right, sure! Go to sleep!" And Mrs. Ladd had gone to sleep, just as if it had not been the brogue that had soothed

her and the hand of an Irish invader that had turned her pillows. And then Bride had put an arm around Olivia, nervously sweeping up the hearth, "Sweetheart, y'll not mind me," she had said. "It's ever since I was a child I've been with the sick an' I love them. Faith, y' would n't mind what they are sayin'. It's what the well say that y' mind."

And so Bride stayed in the sick-room, in full possession, with her nurse's chart, in which she wrote every detail in her fine convent hand, and her little thermometer, and her bright fire, and her open windows, and in fullest measure, Dr. Barker's confidence. It was not by any means the first Fernfield sick-room in which she had been his mainstay and support. Meanwhile, downstairs Olivia and old Timothy kept up the house and cared for the hot-beds and cold-frames, Olivia thanking the overruling powers, whatever they were, that Bride was so efficient and so tender where she herself could not endure to be, and yet longed to be. Never once did she softly turn the knob and tiptoe in with fresh water or squeezed beef juice, or a cup of tea for Bride, or the wood that Timothy left at the door, that her heart did not sicken with the conflict of longing to stay, and yet of fearing, fear-

ing the changed mother in the bed. So downstairs she worked savagely, with flaming cheeks and freezing hands and a voice that did not sound to her like her own. That Patrick Joyce was there off and on all day and steadily all night, anticipating every want and need, and ready for every emergency, made no more difference to her than that old Timothy sat in the kitchen with his mittens on and his muffler round his shoulders, as prepared as a fireman for her call. She saw Joyce down a long, long perspective of fear, and the bitter worst that was coming to her seemed like the blight of winter between them. But still, vaguely, far off from her immediate consciousness, there was a comfort in his big fur coat on the rack in the hall and in the ring of his motor-horn in the stillness.

Once, when he found her sitting dejectedly by the kitchen table with her head buried in her arms, he produced a flask from his deep coat pocket, and when she looked up, smiling wanly at him, he went boldly into the pantry and found a glass and poured it red and full, and then came to her and said, quite gravely and firmly, "You must drink this sherry. You must. You can't kill yourself. You must."

And she obeyed him and nibbled the cracker

he brought from further exploration. Then, when he came back after a whispered talk with Bride in the hall, and found her drowsy from the wine and her vigils, he drew the lounge nearer the fire and beat up the cushions with the vigor of a prize fighter, and said, "Come, now, and lie down. That's a reasonable child. Bride says the temperature's down quite a bit and she's sleeping. Now you will sleep, too, for a while, in the warmth." And she got on the couch and he put the old red afghan over her and she went to sleep. And not once did she protest. He was too remote for her to care. Dacre, too, seemed far out of her life, so far that the rareness of his letters did not matter to her. Everything seemed far away and in the same dim perspective, except the mother upstairs in the big front room with little Bride taking the chance for her.

But worst were the vigils at night when Bride unwillingly left for some rest in the room across the hall. Then Olivia sat in the glow of the little night lamp, shrunken into herself in fear, her big eyes on the bed over there in the shadow, sometimes venturing near and, on her knees, taking her mother's hot hand between hers and saying over and over in the depths of

her thought, "Bravest Mamma! Bravest Mamma! It was to give me everything that you gave all." Then she would turn quickly away with her fingers in her ears, stricken with the rambling talk, the calling upon old names and the terror of old sorrows.

The neighbors came in to help and to sympathize. With them all she was very composed and very confident, and not communicative. In the matter of their coming to stay with her and help, she was very firmly decided. They were very, very kind, but there was not the least need of it. Miss Joyce was most kind and a most experienced nurse. Dr. Barker had asked her to stay. It was a great favor on her part. And there was really very little to do but wait for the crisis. In pneumonia there was so little one could do. With Dr. Britton, however, she was a much less self-possessed Olivia. She talked more freely, and brushed away tears when he spoke of her mother's courage, and even got down on her knees when he ventured to pray with her. But even with him she was quite as firm in her refusal to have Mrs. Archibald or Miss Tibbetts or even Miss Hollins in to help.

"Mamma would be exceedingly displeased to

have any outsider come in," she said. "You know Mamma well enough for that, Dr. Britton."

"But, my child, Miss Joyce is — is very much of an outsider," he ventured.

"Mamma would not refuse to have the nurse the doctor asked to have," she said finally.

And so he went away, thinking as he put on his coat out in the cold hall, of all the sad days he had seen in that old house, and praying that God would hold Olivia in the hollow of His Hand.

"Sometimes, sometimes, He hides us so safe in the hollow of His Hand, and in the shadow of His Wing, that His ways with us are not seen by those who love us and fear for us," he was thinking as he folded in his black silk muffler and went down the garden path through the light snowfall.

When Miss Hollins came, things were very much easier. Miss Hollins was so thankful Bride was there. Bride was very wonderful, equal to anything, and such a dear! But then she would gladly come, too, if Olivia wanted her. Olivia knew that. Miss Hollins loved Mary Ladd just like a sister. And Prunella was feeling much better, quite like a new Prunella. No, it had not been the tonic and the milk. It had just been

that — that things looked different to Prunella. And there were n't many regular boarders except for meals, and she could come as well as — But Olivia would not hear to it — yet. If — if — if things were n't much better soon, then Miss Hollins must come, but not yet, not just now. All the time, as she talked to Miss Hollins and the other old friends and neighbors, she was thinking of the secrets that were being chattered out so piteously upstairs in the big front room.

So Miss Hollins had gone away, and sent back cake and brandy peaches and dandelion wine and baked beans and a mince pie and a roast fowl, all tucked into Bobbie's little red wagon, with Bobbie as motive power, in the purple muffler and mittens she had just made for him between times.

Then had come the night of the crisis. Strength was at so low an ebb that the poignant raving was silenced and only the labored breath and the plucking fingers gave sign of life. Bride was on her knees with bowed head every moment she was not hovering near her patient. The doctor had come at six and would come again at twelve, in spite of the blinding snow that had been falling since dawn, muffling

the whole world out from the sad old house. Olivia went up and down, a thousand ages older than herself, with dry throat and flaming cheeks and cold hands. Downstairs, Patrick Joyce tended the fires and walked back and forth, back and forth the length of study and dining-room, and old Timothy, with the dog at his feet, crouched by the kitchen stove, rubbing his hard old hands together nervously in his enforced idleness and dropping into little dozes. It was a relief that the paths needed shovelling so often and the fires burnt out so soon.

Presently, with a little gust of cold hall air, Olivia came into the study and shut the door.

"Won't you — won't you rest on the lounge, Mr. Joyce?" she said. "I'm quite fresh and ready and you're so tired. I'm just killing you and Bride." She sat down in her little-girl rocker by the hearth and held her cold hands to the blaze he had made so cheerful.

"Oh, no, indeed! I'm not a bit tired. And you're — you're very good to Bride and me to let us help you. It is what Bride loves above all things, that she can help those that she loves." He leant on the high back of the armchair opposite her and looked at her a moment, and then away from her into the flames.

"There 's a chance! There 's a chance still," she exclaimed breathlessly, clasping her hands tight in her lap.

"Of course there 's a chance. There 's a great chance. Just keep believing and trusting that."

"I wish — I wish I could do what Bride is doing," she sighed.

"Faith, I can guess what Bride is doing," he said, with a little smile. "It 's the best thing one can do."

"Can you do it? Can you?"

"I can't do it like Bride, the way it 's like — like speaking with your Father, so sure it is and so loving. But I can — can stammer a bit."

She started up and sat down again. It was the clock striking eleven. She had grown whiter even in the firelight. She buried her face in her hands. Joyce stood very still watching the low flames shining on her bowed head. She looked up before he had looked away.

"In one hour!" she whispered. "In one hour! Oh, I wish I could!" Then she got up and going to the window pulled back the old red rep curtains. "Wonderful! Wonderful!" she whispered on, looking out at the dim white

world beyond the drift-piled windows. "Real Christmas weather. And snow's so good for tobacco fields."

Then she went into the kitchen, to Timothy asleep by the stove.

"Why in the world don't you go to bed, Timothy?" she said. "You 'll make yourself sick. There 's nothing more to do to-night."

He awoke with a start. "Shure, Miss, an' there's the paths to shovel for the doctor. And there 's no slape in me eyes."

"Oh no, no, Timothy. Everything has been done. You go to bed and get a good sleep. But first, here 's some hot coffee and doughnuts for you. Miss Hollins's doughnuts, Timothy. You know how good they are."

And Joyce, from his place by the fire, could see her pouring out the coffee and stopping to roll the doughnuts in powdered sugar, and setting out the sugar and cream.

"Let me see, Timothy," she said. "It's three lumps you take?"

"It is, Miss. God love y'!"

Then she came back to her little chair for a moment, and stared into the fire, and Joyce went on with his walk.

"If you — you could, please, please, be doing

what Bride is doing," she said, looking up as he came near.

"I am," he smiled back. "I'm doing my best."

"Thank you," she said, almost formally, and then after a long look at the fire, she went softly out and upstairs.

There things were unchanged. Bride was on her knees by the little table at the head of the bed. The lamplight shone in the glass of water with the spoon across the top. The little round clock ticked sharply. A fresh wind moved the curtains at the half-open west window. She sat down close to Bride in the big armchair. The lamplight turned the soft hair on her bowed head to fine gold.

She looked up at Olivia with a little smile.

"I am not praying so hard because it is hopeless," she whispered. "I'm just begging God because He's — He's almost willing, I think."

Olivia put her hand in Bride's.

So they were sitting when they heard the far, hushed jingle of sleighbells. It stopped at the gate with a sudden tinkle. The study door opened. There were steps in the hall. Olivia went to the window and looked out. A long beam of light fell on the pathway. Dr. Barker

was tramping up, stamping the snow off on the steps, talking in low tones to Patrick in the hall. The front door shut. He was coming upstairs, not with a young step, the good old doctor who had brought her into the world in that very room.

Bride opened the door. Olivia sank on her knees behind the curtains, against the window. The fine snow sifted in, through the crack, on her cheek. What was he going to say? She could not bear it. She put her fingers in her ears.

"O God! O God! You know all about Mamma. You know all about Mamma," her heart was throbbing. "Don't, God! Please, please, don't!"

Then in the heat and the cold and the throbbing Dr. Barker's arm went round her and his laugh made the fingers fly out of her ears.

"She 's sweating, child. She 'll pull through," he was saying. "Now be brisk and get us some fresh water."

"Yes, sir!" she said, like a child, as the agony slipped off. "Yes, sir!"

And then she flew downstairs to the door Joyce opened for her. At the sight of him, she gave a little laugh and swayed a little.

"Suppose it had n't been! Suppose it had n't been!" she cried as he caught her in his arms.

And for a moment she leaned there close, clutching his arm, with her little cry, her head on his shoulder, his hand on her hair. He let her sob and sob, and laugh, and then the tears came and she buried her face deeper on his shoulder. "And she's sweating! She's sweating!" she cried. "She'll live. And it's you and Bride! It's you and Bride!"

Then suddenly, with another little laugh, she started back, her wet face crimson.

"Oh! Oh! I beg a thousand pardons!" she cried. "I did not know what I was doing! I am so glad! Nothing matters, does it! It — it might have been Timothy! I should n't have cared. Plucky Mamma! Is n't she a good one! And — and — " She stopped and took the handkerchief Joyce handed her and wiped her face and brushed back her tossed hair. "Oh, it was water I said I'd get. I must hurry. He's waiting. Perhaps it's a drink for Mamma. God bless him!"

And then she cried again while Joyce was getting her fresh water from the pump in the woodshed.

"See! See how I've spotted your coat," she said gayly as she took the little pitcher and ran upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

CALENDAR-DAY

SOLOMON CLABBY'S pawprints spotted the driven snow on Mrs. Clabby's front porch. It was New Year's afternoon and Solomon's mistress was celebrating at Mrs. Archibald's, whither she had gone in the early forenoon, bearing a temperance mince pie flavored with cold tea instead of liquor, and a cake made by a recipe that did n't call for eggs. Solomon himself was not of the party. His dinner was in a cracked blue saucer under the kitchen stove, or had been, for he had partaken of every scrap of it, and was seated in the front window close against the pane, licking his paws and then rubbing them meditatively over his nose. Now and then he paused and pricked up his ears at the flocks of sparrows that fluttered down from the cedar trees. There had been an arborvitæ hedge in front of Mrs. Clabby's little gabled cottage, but she had had it cut down, for reasons.

Presently, the sparrows out on the snow scattered wildly. A sleigh jingled swiftly by, a cutter filled with robes and fur coats, and in the

robes and coats, Olivia Ladd and Patrick Joyce. Solomon did not even stop his massage. He blinked at the sparrows up on the cedar boughs and rubbed a moist paw over both eyes on its way to an ear.

Mrs. Clabby and Mrs. Archibald were just too late, in their rush to the window at the sound of the bells.

"Looks t' me like Kittie Dusenberry and that sewing-machine agent over at the Corners," Mrs. Clabby said. "They say he 's sweet on her. For my part, I 'd ruther marry a fireman than a sewing-machine agent. Then you 'd know quick if they was t' die. Sewing machine agents is always away an' you never do know what 's happenin' them." And she flicked the mince pie crumbs off her crocheted jabot.

"Nor what they 're up to," Mrs. Archibald threw in, swallowing her bite of pie. "Bad 's sailors for flirtin' with the girls. I knew a girl as married a Singer agent an' ef he did n't have the hull back of his wagon full of — yes, full — "

Sarah Tibbetts did n't see them either. She was knitting a new kind of edging for white petticoats, with her nose close to the needles. And Mrs. Egerton had her feet on the fender and a nubia round her head, nursing neuralgia.

But Prunella did. Prunella had been down to Father Zujewski's with a plum pudding. She had taken it down piping hot, just about the time she thought a person would be likely to come to dessert in their New Year's dinner. Besides, she had preferred to go at dinner-time. It was a safer hour for people that were heroines. And that was how she happened to see the other heroine. Just at the town hall, when she was preparing, with uplifted skirt, to plunge into the unbroken snow, she saw them jingle swiftly by, Olivia in her father's old sealskin cap with that bright hair of hers flying and her cheeks rosy, just as if she had n't been going through all the strain of Mrs. Ladd's illness, and Patrick Joyce, handsomer even than ever in his furs, holding in a lively, high-stepping bay. They did n't see Prunella. They were laughing and looking at each other.

Prunella floundered wildly through the drifts and rushed home. Miss Hollins was piling the dishes at the sink, and thinking of other New Years. On one of them a young minister had called upon her and written in her autograph album. She remembered the verse perfectly: —

"In intercourse of mind with mind,
The highest, purest joy we find."

He had written it right off out of his head. And then he had gone to the Friendly Islands to spread the gospel, and never—

"Aunt Lou, what do you suppose I 've seen! What do you suppose! This village is going just crazy." And Prunella slammed the door and scattered snow all over the kitchen.

"For pity's sake, Prunella! What is the matter?" Miss Hollins cried, dropping a buttered knife right into the glass suds. "Just see what a mess you 're making."

"But Aunt Lou! Listen! I 've seen Olivia and Patrick Joyce dashing off in a cutter, all robes and fur coats, and looking so hard at each other that they nearly ran over me. Now, Aunt Lou! What do you—"

Miss Hollins dropped on the nearest chair. "Thank God! I knew it! I've been praying for it. Prunella, if you dare to tell a syllable to—to—to—"

"To whom, Aunt Lou! To Mrs. Clabby, I suppose you mean. Of course I 'll tell her right away. And now Dacre 'll be off my mind. But I shall write Stefan, Aunt Lou."

"Stefan 's different, Prunella. Well, of all things. It 's like living in a story, the way you young folks keep things busy. Poor Dacre!

I loved his mother. He looks — There 's the bell. Who under the sun at this time o' day!"

Prunella threw off her wraps and her rubbers and went to the door. There was laughter and then the closing door and then a man's voice, and in a minute Prunella's amazed face in the pantry window.

"It 's Mr. Michael Joyce, Aunt Lou," she whispered dramatically. "He's come to see you. So, you see, things are happening!"

Meanwhile, things were happening out on the white fields under Mount Toby, where the big bay carried the jingling cutter so swiftly over the unbroken roads. And yet the two in the cutter were not saying momentous things as the sharp air stung their cheeks and the snow flew out from under their runners and the sun sparkled on the icy trees, and the vines and fern along the walls.

"It seems awfully selfish to be having all this, and poor little Bride at home shut up with Mamma," Olivia was saying, drawing in a deep breath.

"But you've had no air in all these long weeks. Not once would y' go with me till the doctor got on my side to-day, God bless him,"

Joyce protested. "And many an outing has Bride had since your mother's better."

"And then" — she hesitated — "then to have to go secretly — without Mamma's knowing about it. It does n't seem right. It would be more — more honorable to stay right at home till Mamma's well enough to know — know of all your adorable kindness and just who Bride is."

"And let y' die in the meanwhile," he cried with a laugh. "Not much for such honor!" Then suddenly, in quite a different tone, he went on, looking very carefully at the fine spirited ears of the bay as he talked. "Y're sayin' a lot about adorable kindness, and wondering what y' can be doing to return it. Faith, it's no return I want f'r what is like — like life t' me. But will y' " — and he turned and looked quite directly into the eyes that turned so frankly to his — "will y' do something f'r me just — just because — because we're friends, perhaps, and life's such a sorry mixup anyhow?"

She colored slowly even under the rose of the wind, as she still let him look quite directly into her eyes. "Yes," she said. "I will, because — because we are friends."

"Then it's this. Just let's have to-day for our day to be merry in. You see, in my people there's just this little wild streak of — of recklessness. An Irishman can die with a jest on his lips. So to-day will y' just forget — not look behind and not look before — just at each other and to-day? It was what Deirdre and Naoise did — they looked not to the past or the future." So earnestly had he spoken and so slowly that the bay was quite down in the drifts at the roadside, and it took a quick pull and a call to get him back into the tracks.

"I will," she said. "I will. Just have a jolly good time and forget all the cares and the anxieties and the horrid things!" "And Dacre," she added to herself. It would not be wrong for six or seven hours to forget him when he himself told in his letters of the rides to Versailles and Fontainebleau and Chantilly with the models and the artists. Surely, on those gay parties, Dacre was not thinking of her. And he had had no fearful four weeks of illness to wear him out, and there were no cares and no hard work like her work waiting for him in the gay Quartier.

"And, besides," she went on, aloud, with a laugh, "it's New Year's Day. We 've got to

make a calendar-day for the year, have n't we! And first will you tell me all that I did n't find in the encyclopedia about your ring."

"I will," he said. "I will tell y' anything y' ask me," and he laughed and threw back his head until she could not fail to see what nice, strong white teeth he had. "But y'll be disappointed when y' hear, if y're thinking 't was some girl that gave it to me. 'T was my father's ring, the ring my mother gave him and she the daughter of a Galway fisherman. 'T was in the Claddagh she lived, and her people were good, but very simple folk. And it was not at all the match that my father's family were making for him, that he should be marrying a fisherman's daughter. But my father loved her and she loved him, and — and that was all. Some day," — he stopped and colored a little and laughed — "sometime, please God, I 'll be giving it to — to the girl that I love." And again he looked carefully and critically at the spirited ears of the high-stepping bay.

"That is a much nicer story than if — if a girl had given it to you. The modern stories are n't half so nice and romantic as the old stories, do you think so?" And she, too, looked ahead at Sugarloaf with its deep russet preci-

pices powdered with snow in and out of the little black cedars.

"The modern stories are quite the same as the old stories," he said. "Faith, there's just the same joy in them, and the same pain. And our hearts are the same in the aching. Only to-day — to-day we're afraid to be speaking the truth to each other."

"Suppose" — she hesitated — "suppose we do not know the truth."

He gave the bay a sharp cut that sent the snow flying up into their faces. "We do always know the truth when we love. That is how we know that it is love — because, faith, we know."

They were turning off from the highway into unbroken snow, under the low branches that arched over a mountain woodroad. On the left, a little brook gurgled and cascaded under the ice, and on the left snowy cedars and pines climbed up the white slopes of Toby. A rabbit scurried out from under the icy fern and leaped across their way. Above them a crow cawed in the cold blue above the black tree-tops.

"One could forget here," she said with a long breath out of her far-away thought.

"And know the truth?" he questioned, very low.

"Some people, perhaps," she answered slowly. "Some people who are — are free. But we — we old village families — we are not free. We are born into certain things. We can't get away from our fates. It 's like a — a hideous Greek tragedy. We 've got to do the — the things our fathers and grandfathers have — have fooled us into doing!" She spoke bitterly, and he could see the shine of unshed tears in the eyes that looked ahead up the white winding of the road.

They were rounding a curve into a bleak clearing with its deserted woodcutter's hut and snow-topped piles of yellow logs.

Joyce held the lines tight. "Y've not to do that," he said tensely. "Y've just to choose when y'r heart tells y', the way nothing can keep y' apart."

She made no answer, and they drove on in the hush, with the brook's quiet voice following them and the light snow blowing off the trees. She was afraid to look at him. In her Greek tragedy, his face against the dark pines was like that of a white, stern-lipped Apollo defying the Fates.

Ahead of them, beyond the clearing, a blasted sycamore stood, gaunt and gray, at the forking of the roads. A little change had come

over the woods. The first delicate foreboding of night had dulled the sunshine, and the shadows lay level along the snow.

"Which way do we go?" he exclaimed, out of his long quiet. "Faith, I don't know the right road from the wrong, and not a track is there except that deerprint. Shall we trust to your Fate that y're so mindful of, and see where she 'll lead us. Sure, I don't much care. Do you?" And he turned and looked into her eyes as he had looked that day across the brook.

"But, Mamma!" she said quickly, dropping her eyes. "Just for her I care."

He loosened the lines and leaned back. The high-stepping bay did not hesitate as to the decision of fate. Instinct guided him to the left, across the brook, into a smoother road broken by a wagon track or two, and presently they were jingling as merrily down hill as if they were no smallest part of a Greek tragedy. A cold wind blew sharp in their faces. Joyce turned and pulled the robes up close around her, and stooped and gathered them well over her feet.

"Y're warm enough, sweetheart?" he said in a whisper, as if the very woods might blast him for his daring.

"Oh, yes," she whispered back, with a surge of color.

And then they jingled down past other clearings, past fields and farmhouses into the valley already gray with the coming twilight. The pleasant smell of newly fed woodfires greeted them, and just ahead, at the meeting of hill-road and highway, a little inn showed cheerful early lights. The high-stepping bay made for the lights and the barn beyond.

Joyce drew a long breath. "We 'll stop here for a bit of hot tea, if y' will," he said. "D' y' see the firelight there in that little front parlor? Faith, I 'm thinking the doctor himself would advise some tea there and some toast."

And so he parted the robes and helped her out, and she ran in and stood shivering over the fire while he put the sleigh into the stable and ordered the toast and the tea. Dreamily and unseeingly she looked around the little room with the melodeon and the Nottingham lace curtains and the crayon portraits and the centre table with the white crochet cover and the Rogers group. And then she sank down in a chair by the fire and listened to her heartbeats throbbing in her ears, and wondered if Dacre

had forgotten so long when he went to Versailles, and so — so absolutely.

And then Joyce came in, tossing his coat and cap over a chair and rubbing his hands that were stiff from the driving.

"Faith, y'll not be taking y'r tea in that great coat y' have on," he said, almost gayly, helping her out of it. "And I've ordered the toast and the tea and the marmalade, just as if it were in the old country itself. And we 'll pull the table up to the fire and be as cosy as kings."

She caught his mood, and when the tray came in she was very busy with the tea-things while he talked to the landlord about the eight miles back to Fernfield and the full moon that would light them and the early coming of the twilight. And the landlord was very friendly and gave him the exact time, just five-thirty, and brought in the morning paper and a pitcher of homemade cider, and then went out and shut the door.

"Is n't it fun!" Olivia said, gay in her turn, but not meeting his eyes. "And such bread and butter! Lots better than your toast! And your tea? Did I pour it right?"

"Just right," he said, absently looking into her eyes.

"I have n't had a jolly afternoon tea like this, off in a queer little place, since — since college, and that seems years ago," she went on quickly. "We girls used to tramp to all sorts of queer little places and have tea, and I love it. I wish Bride were here to have some, too. Are n't you going to drink yours?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "I'm going to take mine. An' y' remember y' asked me to tell y' the story of Deirdre, that time in the barn in the storm?"

"Indeed, I do remember. Could you tell it to me now, here in this nice firelight, before we go on? Is it too long a story?"

"No, it's not too long a story. It's not worth bringing a lamp, the time it 'll take in the telling."

He drained his teacup and got up and took the low chair at her side on the beflowered hearth-rug. "Y' see, I was telling y' that Deirdre had been kept away in the woods, in a wee house, quite hidden from all men, the way the beauty and the sweetness of her would be making no harm," he went on in his low voice that seemed to her to tremble a little. Her eyes she was keeping on the tea-leaves in the bottom of her cup. "And then a huntsman heard her singing,

and he told Conchubar, the king, all about her, the way he could not rest until he had brought her to his court at Emain Macha and she had promised to marry him in a year and a day. And Conchubar got her wise teachers and gentle companions, and every day he was loving her more and counting the days till she would be his wife. Am I tiring y' with the telling — sweetheart?"

She had put her cup down and leaned her chin in her palms as she listened.

"Oh, no!" she whispered breathlessly.

"Sweetheart!" he murmured again, touching her hair where the firelight touched it.

And then he went on, with a long breath, "And one day when Deirdre and her gentle companions were out in the fields in the sunshine, she saw coming over the hill towards them, three men, and she grew crimson red and she said in her heart, 'Faith, I know him. The beautiful one of these men is Naoise, and he the one I've been seeing in my dreams this many a day!' And love came into her heart like lightning, the way she could not but follow him. And the two brothers of Naoise saw her coming, and they fearing her because she was to be the bride of Conchubar, the king. And they

did not look back and they widened the distance between them, and Deirdre crying after them in the sweet voice of her, 'Naoise! Naoise! Will y' be leaving me?' And when she had cried the third time, Naoise heard and — and he stopped and turned back to her — and met Deirdre all breathless from the running — and looked deep into the sweet eyes of her — and they — they kissing one another three times and — "

And somehow he was on his knees at her side and his arms were round her and his lips on hers, and he was murmuring, "Sure, it's not Fate that I'm fearing — or kings — sweetheart — if — if y' love me!"

And she did not draw away. For that one wild little moment she did not fear Fate. Why should she care when this — this was what she was born for? What did anything matter — now that she knew!

"It's not Fate that y're fearing now, sweetheart!" he whispered, looking deep into her eyes.

Somewhere a clock twanged six.

She drew quickly away and started up. "You made me — forget," she said, pushing him back. "The day's done — our calendar-day. Don't

you know — about Dacre? Ever since we were children — "

"That's why!" he broke in hotly. "No choice has been given y'. I know. And so it was with Aileen before my heart cried out f'r y'."

She turned from him and went to the fire, away from his eyes that hurt her so.

"But, you see," she said slowly, "there are other — other things — old — old family wrongs. I have no choice. You will believe me!" She turned again to him. In the firelight he could see the trembling of her lips. "You are so great and generous," she went on, very low, and not looking at him. "I will tell you. Long ago, in the summer, my heart began to speak to me. I knew the truth — that — that I loved you. But I would not give in. And now you will be generous. One cannot break vows. You will not make it too hard — now that I know?"

"I will not," he whispered hoarsely. And then he opened the door and went out to get the sleigh.

Presently the landlord came in bringing a lamp under a yellow shade decorated with brilliant purple grapes, and set it on the centre-table by the open newspaper, and made a little

joke about tea's being a weak drink for New Year's Day. When he had gone out with the tray, she sat down by the table and tugged at her gloves through eyes blinded with tears. And when the tears had been forced back, she looked unseeingly at the paper there by the lamp, with the news of the wide world in its close-printed sheets.

And then out of the close print and into her pain there burned a big headline over several smaller lines. She had read it twice before it meant anything to her, the news that said: —

AMERICAN ARTIST KILLED IN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT

CANNES, FRANCE. Dec. 31, 19—. While speeding on the Grande Corniche Road — between Eze and Roccabruna, an automobile belonging to Alexis Orloff, a Russian artist now living in Paris, dashed over a precipice into a gorge two hundred feet below. The others in the party were Dacre Welling, an American artist, about whom nothing is known, and two women, names unknown. All were instantly killed.

When she looked up, Joyce stood in the doorway in his fur coat. He was very white.

She pointed to the paper. "Do you see —

do you see — " she said thickly, "what has been happening while — while I have forgotten?"

He grew crimson as he read.

All the way home in the cold moonlight, she sat silent, far from him, in the sleigh.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"LET'S MAKE IT A HOLIDAY!"

A HEAVY yellow bee buzzed just outside the window, but By did not look up from "Mother Tongue, Part II."

"A noun is the name of a person, place or thing; like John, Boston, kite," he murmured again and again. How could a fellow mind bees or hornets or anything when the examinations were next week and Miss Ladd sat at the desk not watching! A great truster Miss Ladd was! Now she was sitting with her chin propped in her palm and her eyes away out of the window on the left side of the picture of President Lincoln. If she had been a watcher, or had not been Miss Ladd, and he had not had certain transactions and conversations with Mr. Patrick Joyce before he and his sister went away on their trip, why, then, he might have found interesting possibilities in that bee so near Basia Komanski's sleek yellow head.

Across the room, Apollonia, with close-shut eyes and moving lips, was saying Presidents on

her fingers, and behind her, Stefanya carefully moved her stubby finger down the columns of her spelling-book. So soundless was the room, and yet so vividly alive and so receptive every child, from big Roman Krasinska down to smiling little Marinska, that they seemed only part of the growing world outside, absorbing, breathing in, taking root, blossoming.

Olivia, languidly present at the desk, wondered how the sturdy little things could work in such heat. The last weeks of May had been like July, and now this first week in June — the last school week — was like August. It was hard on her and the children, but glorious for the crops. And it was of her crops that she was thinking, with unmanageable little breaks, as she looked out beyond Lincoln at the new pale green of the onion fields. Things were promising beyond her wildest dreams, the tobacco deal with Tony Wyzocki the most promising of all. Ten acres of her rich river bottom already set with husky young plants and half of the proceeds hers! That looked like being ready to pay off the mortgage that was due in three weeks! And then came the break in her agricultural calculations. The mortgage — the dear Joyces! And, surely, soon Patrick and Bride would be back from their

long sight-seeing in the South and West. The picture postcards of cowboys and old missions and the Golden Horn and Chinatown and the Grand Canyon all said that they would soon be coming home. And surely no one could be kinder and dearer than Mr. Michael Joyce since they left, and no one more delicate. Even her mother knew now of all the fraud that had been practised upon her during the winter, and laughed about it, and adored Bride, although she always finished her admissions and eased her pride with, "But then there are Irish and Irish! And the Joyces are really French! They came from France to Galway in the time of Elizabeth and the name was Norman and was spelt 'Joyes.' So they are very different, Olivia."

Surely, after all the kindness that was more like blessedness, surely, it was fortunate that she could pay off the mortgage and not have them feel any longer the drain on their goodness. And then — and then when Patrick came home! There her thought grew hot and incoherent. What would happen when Patrick came home? By, watching through the clasped fingers that propped his head, saw the swift color flood her neck and face. What would hap-

pen when Patrick came home, now that the old vow was canceled in that lonely grave by the Mediterranean.

But about the crops! She drew a long breath, and sat up, and remembered the young cucumbers and melons and tomatoes and eggplants now coming out of the hot-beds that she and Timothy had struggled over so valiantly and untiringly during the black weeks after New Year's. Oh, the darling, darling home fields! How they were smiling and giving back to her the love she put into them! And her mother, in the invalid chair that Timothy proudly pushed up and down among the beets and cabbages and lettuce and peas and beans and eggplants, and over to the edge of the fields where, after the abundant turnip crop, Dinny and Jerry had put in the corn, or after the winter rye, had seeded down the clover, and even to the tobacco fields where Tony Wyzocki and his wife and his mother and her mother and her mother's sister and a flock of children were weeding and hoeing and tending the young plants! What a triumphant moment it was when Mrs. Ladd, on her return, after drinking her port wine that had come with the compliments of Mr. Michael Joyce, said, quite complacently, "I 've been

around a little, Olivia, Timothy and I. It 's quite a miracle, is n't it, Timothy ? "

Timothy took off his cap and scratched his gray poll. " Begorra, Miss, if the angels an' saints thimselves had druv the ploughs and scattered the sade and fanned away the burrds with the white wings of thim, no more beautiful a sight would it be ! " he said fervently.

" You, Olivia," Mrs. Ladd went on with a satisfied smile, " you have inherited the best traits of — of your ancestors. And next year, we — we might try onions."

Next year! When Patrick was there! And again Olivia's vegetable hopes drifted into dreams.

And then, just as she recalled herself and looked at the clock and saw that it was eleven and time for the Third Class in Reading, something else came into the window where the bumblebee had buzzed. This time By looked up and out and pricked up his nice big ears. Then he looked at Miss Ladd. Had she heard it, standing there with her hand pressed close over her crisp white waist just where her jaunty blue four-in-hand tie ended, and with the color flaming in her cheeks? Apollonia had. She looked at By and he smiled and then she looked

at Miss Ladd. Again it came, not a buzz at all, but a wild, shrill, beloved shriek, nearer, nearer, nearer, round the curve, up to the very school yard. By could see the whole thing. He had sprung up and leaned out of the window, and no one had called for order. And Apollonia was dancing up and down, and every other child was on tiptoe and smiling and whispering.

"Hello!" yelled By out of the window.

"Hello!" called back a voice from the machine.

Miss Ladd had sat down, very white and limp. Apollonia came and stood close by her. And then in a flash there happened something that is not part of the daily programme of district schools.

A school visitor sprang into the room and called merrily, "Hello!" to the amazed children. Then he took the teacher into his arms and kissed her slowly right on the lips, and looked into her eyes and said, "Faith, sweetheart, let 's make it a holiday!"

The school cheered. Usually they did not care for holidays. And then little Nicholas Brogodzd stole out from the ranks and caught the visitor's other hand, the one that was not around the teacher's waist, and the visitor clasped it tight and said gayly, —

"So it 's a holiday, boys and girls. And sure, if y'd like a lift to town in the back of the machine, it 's welcome y' are!"

And presently they were packed in tight, dinner-pails, books, and all, and Miss Ladd, with a little color come back into her cheeks and Nicholas Brogodzd on her lap, was on the seat next the driver, and she was laughing and asking him questions, and he almost running over Mr. Krakinski's pigs for looking at her. And no stop did they make this trip at Fernfield Four Corners. You see, it was mail-time and there were letters to come even if no one wanted to be bothered reading them. So they whirled by the watering-trough and on and on past the town hall and the meeting-house and Mrs. Clabby's and Mrs. Archibald's and Mrs. Egerton's and Sarah Tibbetts's, right up to the post-office.

And there stood Bride waiting to kiss Olivia and greet all the children. And on the porch Dr. Britton and Father Zujewski were opening their mail, but they shut their pen-knives and came down to the machine to see the district school that seemed to be running away, and to greet the far-traveled Mr. Joyce. And then Prunella heard and rushed out to see what in the world the commotion was about, and stood

stock-still and gasped, and then ran down to the car with two big, thick, foreign-looking letters open in her hand. And she shook hands with Mr. Joyce as if he had been her foster brother and was so glad to see him back, and then she leaned into the car and kissed Olivia and said: —

"Oh, Olivia! Are n't you glad you 're through school! I am. And have you heard about Stefan Posadowski? He 's played before the Czar, and His Majesty is crazy about him. I have n't read any further than that, but I just know something grand is going to happen."

And then Olivia said that she was n't quite through school, and how glad she was, and she begged Bride to come, too, on the ride, but Bride was going right down to see Miss Hollins with Uncle Mike. And while they all chattered, and Mrs. Clabby came panting up to see what under the canopy all the screeching was about, the school in the back of the car was dismissed, and the self-starting Pierce Arrow glided off down the shady street, and Patrick's arm went around Olivia's waist and her eyes to his, and off they sped to the far hills that looked like heaven in the new light.

THE END

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